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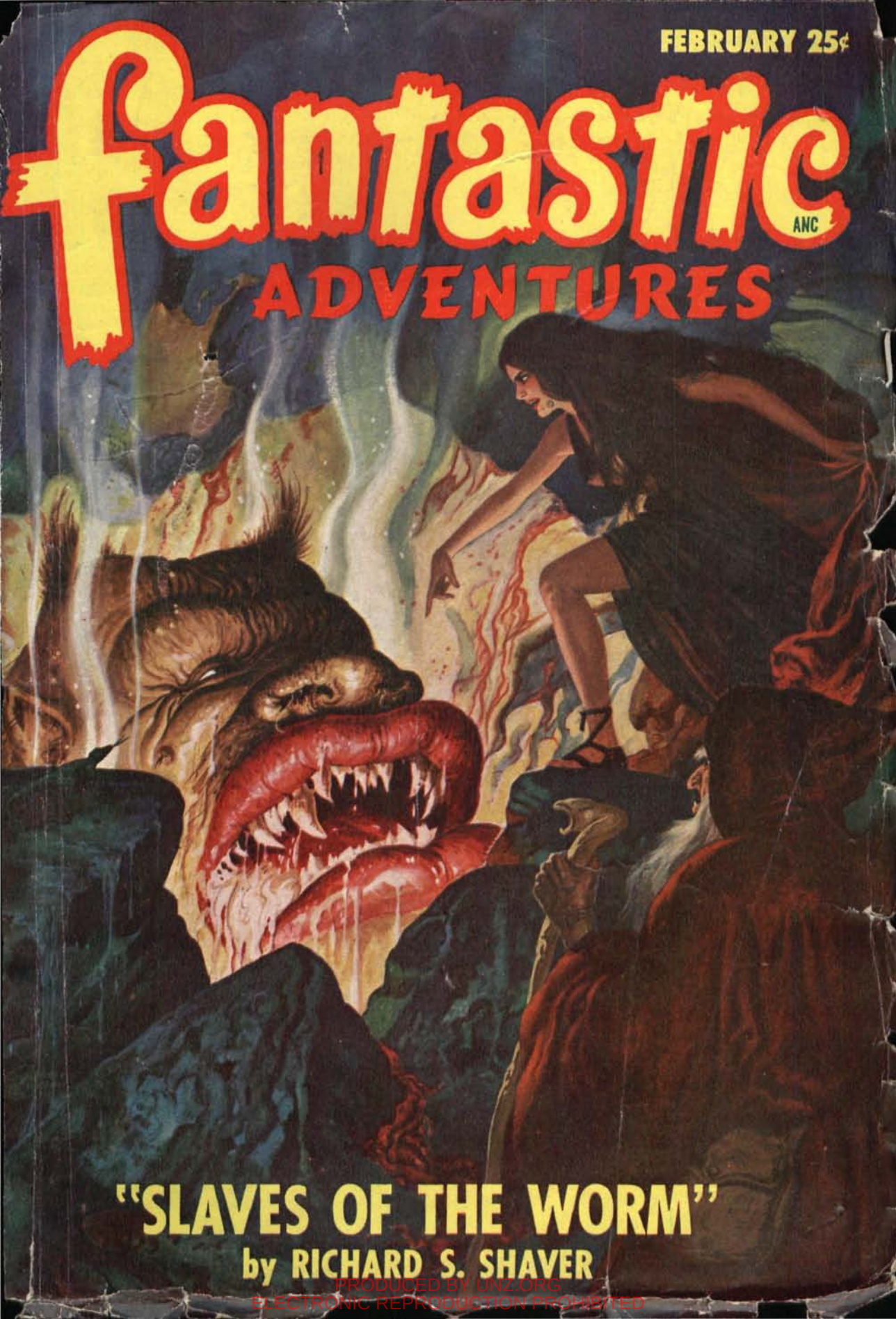

"SLAVES OF THE WORM"

by RICHARD S. SHAVER

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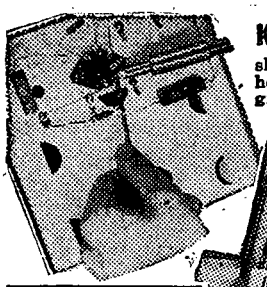

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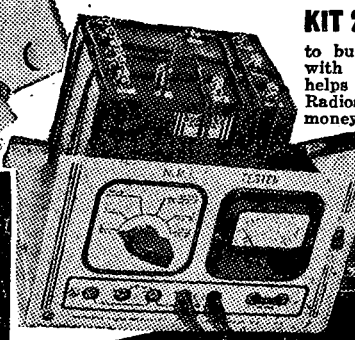

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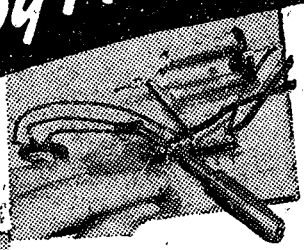

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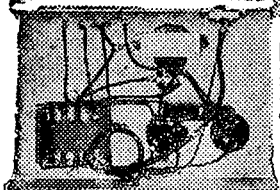

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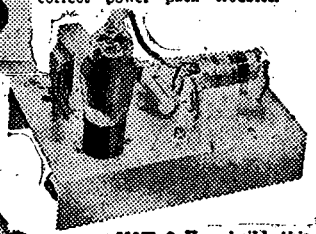

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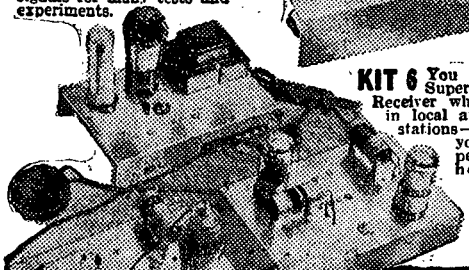

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VOLUME 10 NUMBER 2

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

THE big treat this month is really the whole issue! There, now that we've gotten that off our chest we can sit back and tell you just what we mean. First off, of course, you've seen the cover. Yep, another Bob Jones masterpiece. You know, we're getting to feel like an echo when we say this. Maybe it's because all of Bob's covers *are* masterpieces! At any rate, this month's cover is really a doozy, and we think you'll agree with us.

SO THAT brings up the lead story for this issue, by Dick Shaver. For all of you fantasy fans who have been following the Shaver Mystery in our big sister magazine, *Amazing Stories,* this will prove to be a real treat, for in "Slaves of the Worm" you'll find a lot of meat that bears on the famous Shaver Mystery. And for the rest of you fans who just like a darned good fantasy yarn, we think this yarn will fill the bill for you too. Let us know.

ALEXANDER BLADE is back this month with a short entitled, "The Silver Medusa." There have been many yarns written around the legendary Greek monster with a woman's head and twining serpents for hair. We don't say that this present yarn is exactly written around this legend, but it does concern the Medusa, and we think that Alex has done a fine job of combining an ancient myth with a modern setting. But you'll be the best judge of that after you've finished reading the story.

"TO DUST RETURNETH" is the title of an unusual novelette that H. B. Hickey contributes to this month's collection of fine stories. You all know the old litany, "Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust . . . ," symbolizing, of course, man's return to the ground from whence he sprang. Well, using this as a theme, Hickey takes you to another world where the pattern of life—and after-life are somewhat different. This story combines a number of good elements that go into making a first-class science-fantasy story. You'll find it's an interplanetary, a fantasy, and also enough science injected to make it good science-fiction. What more could be asked for?

AND now we come to one of our pride and joys. We're speaking of your new great favorite, Rog Phillips. In the past year Rog has risen to the top ranks of science-fantasy writers. We can't begin to count the letters that have praised such stories as "So Shall Ye Reap," "The Despoilers," and "High Ears." And justly so. They were great stories. So this month in FA we're presenting a new novelette by Rog, entitled, "Twice to Die." We won't even say a thing more about the story, except that you'll probably turn right now to page 92 and start reading. . . .

WILLIAM P. McGIVERN had an idea. He thought, if you can use the old double cross in our time, then how about in another time—say with a time machine! We thought it was a pretty good idea, not to mention, problem, so we told him to see what he could do with it. The result you'll find on page 120, a time-traveling yarn called "Double Cross in Double Time," and brother, that title means exactly what it says—if you can read between the words. We've given you *enough of a hint here as to what twist Bill put on* the yarn—so try and figure it out before you read it—if you can. And then let us know how you liked it.

A STEADY top favorite of all you fans is our next contributor for this issue — Robert Moore Williams. Bob returns this month with a yarn entitled, "Miracle Man." Here again the title speaks for itself. You know you're going to read a story about a man who either produces miracles or is one himself. But even though Bob is being very generous with telling you a lot in the title, we can assure you that Williams' mastery holds a few surprises in the climax of the story that you'll only get after reading it. But aside from all this, Bob can always be depended upon to turn out the best in fantasy fiction—and this new story is no exception. . . .

FINISHING up the stories for this month is an unusual yarn by Gordon Philip England, entitled, "They Buried Her Body." It concerns a woman who dabbled in what might be called the "black arts." But whether she was a witch in the true sense of the word is something else. You can decide that for yourself.

WHICH just about winds up this month's editorial. But we'll be back next month telling you all about a great cover story entitled: "The Court of Kublai Khan." See you then.....WLH

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"SLAVES OF THE WORM"

by RICHARD S. SHAVER

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FOREWORD

TO UNDERSTAND the people and events of this account, you must know first that they are not of the world you are accustomed to regard as familiar to you.

In the caverns below this surface world of ours, there dwell a people unknown except to occasional unfortunate humans.

Now, in these caverns there is a great, a mighty abyss.

From the rims of this abyss the people of the caverns look down through the mist-layered vastnesses. On some days when the fluctuating luminescence they call "light" is strong, and the heavy air is clear, can be seen in the murk of the bottom of the terrible abyss —the Black Cross!

It is the custom of the people of the caverns above the Abyss to bow down, then, when the Cross is seen, to pray, to offer pitiful gifts to the depths below, and to the terror of the fearful Thing the Cross represents.

That Thing is supposed to dwell in the abyss. And it is true that terrible and unknown and powerful forms of intelligent life do dwell in the abyss, and are greater in some ways than the race of man.

Certain members of these benighted people of the hidden caverns above the abyss pretend to have the favor of the terrible Being who is not seen, and these people wear upon their breast a large black Cross of stone. That Cross is not like our Cross, being with arms of equal length, and about the arms entwined the terrible form of the Worm of the Abyss.

These wearers of the Cross are a formidable organization.

There are other strange customs among these people. For they are not as we know men to be. They are four-limbed, and look much as we do; but beneath that familiar facade of fleshly appearance beats a heart that responds wholly to stimuli unearthly and alien to our minds.

There are two poles of intent among them. Between these two poles exist the common people, who suffer and labor and support all the rest.

One pole is a class who have inverted words, meanings and thought so that beauty becomes vile, vile deeds art. Thus virtue is ostracized crime, and repellent outrage, license, spoliation are the law of life that must be obeyed.

The other pole of intent is made up of those most aware of the inverted nature of their life. These are the recreants and rebels against the inverted order.

Thus natural human goodness is the enemy of the Black Cross, the ruling organization.

These rebels are known to all as the White Hearts . . .

"Bow to the Worm, and hit sin's flame;
Life's—to the Evil, and War is the game."
(From Ballade of the Black Brethren)

AMONG those new-entered into the evil brotherhood, that brotherhood known as the Fellowship of the Black Cross, was tonight the young and handsome Morro.

In his tight-fitting black clothing, the puffed breeches and shoulder puffs slashed with Witch-crimson, upon his breast the great scarlet symbol of the Worm of the Abyss, he outshone the other men present as the sun the stars.

There was an insatiate eye drawn to Morro. The owner of the insatiate eye turned to one who stood beside her overlooking the revel. His scarlet robes were heavy with embroidered gold, and upon his breast the Worm

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of the Abyss was worked out in beads of ebon, with great eyes of emerald. His vulpine head was white with age, his hooked nose thin and his heavy lips drooping with a century of satiety.

"Oh, Father of Evil, who is the vigorous male acolyte?" The owner of the insatiate eye twisted her voluptuous body closer to the aged leader, pointed with her eyes to the stalwart figure overtopping the men about him.

The aged Master drooped his heavy crepe of eyelids in thought, murmured slowly in answer—"One named Morro, of whom I know little, except that he is adept with a blade, knows the art of poison, and is much feared by his enemies. Has applied for full membership in our inner circle, and full benefits. His record gives his request weight, proud Vana. You will see more of him."

"One who will become great among us, eh, Father? 'Tis not too soon to harness him to my will!"

"If you can, Vana. Is not so easy a mark as the ordinary man, I would say."

VANA cast the lure of her white body and lovely face into his mind from far off with her art, and swayed closer to him in the revels.

The white beauty of her limbs moved sultrily behind sheer blood-red silk, traced over with the evil arabesques of the Black Cross credo in flame-gold.

Her finger nails were jet-black, her pink fingers subtly beckoned Morro closer to her; her eyes peering from her mantling midnight tresses like golden cat's eyes from the night. Upon the sable mystery of hair gold-dust evanesced glitteringly.

Her finger tips touched Morro's swarthy muscled wrist, and Vana's touch sent into his blood the consuming fire, the vampiric evil entered his body from hers, began there the witch-work which was to leave Morro the servile tool of that which Vana thought was her will.

"Dance with me, Morro," the sultry honey-sweet voice begged him. The fire her touch had lit blazed higher within him at the sound of her voice.

"How is it you know me, Vana the Proud? I am new-come to these halls."

"I inquired of the Master himself. So I know much about you already, as much as anyone . . ."

To Morro's casual, unknowing eye, her white body and lovely chiseled face shone virtuous, desirable as truth. Pliantly young and beautiful as Sin itself, she seemed above the creeping horror that devoured every weakling thing and left her still triumphant and alive.

But of all insatiate devils of the Inner Councils of the Black Cross, Vana was the one most catered to, for she was most high in power, above even the Master in some respects. In the eyes of the knowing among the awful brotherhood of the Cross, Vana was supreme.

For Vana had made secret alliance with the most feared of the intelligences of the Depths of the Abyss.

Never can mere words tell it, not ever can pictures show you the foul life of the rot pits of the Abyss. The growing, moving slimes, the dreadful thinking worms, the aborted, mutating creatures neither beast nor man nor worm, but something of each.

These creatures were deadly in their lure. It was one of these who had given rise to the legend of the Thing the Black Cross represented, a King of Devils, a God of Evil, a creature wholly lubricious and wholly poisonous to all other life. Man-headed mutant reptilian.

There were great numbers of these

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monstrous growths, beings of strange and evil growth and cunning nature, in the depths of the Abyss where the Black Cross reared it's immense shape towering miles above the floor. Most of them were deadly to man. Yet the Worm, their Master, was worshipped and served by the people who wore the Black Cross.

THE average dupe of the Black Cross was forbidden to enter the reaches of the cavern where the slime creatures nested.

The source of the Worm's power was its nature. Born to attract prey by projecting images and ideas into the brain, a kind of irresistible lure telepathic, promising effortless ecstasy and toilless support for their life—offering endless debauches without the toll of exhaustion,—offering endless erotic adventure paid for by the bodies of others. There were others among the creatures possessed of this power, but the Worm was the Master.

It was the Worm which had allied Vana to itself, giving into her body some of its blood, so that Vana also possessed this power.

Around these creatures the Priests of the Black Cross had built their Devil-God legend, for few of them were seen or understood fully by any but the priests who sheltered and cared for them.

Thus it was that Morro did not know what it was he embraced when he danced with Vana the proud.

She was but the lure, the most potent bait of the Worm, and she belonged personally to the Worm. Vana it was that he dangled before the eyes of victims. When their reaching hands touched Vana, it was the consuming fire of the Worm's body that stole into them, consuming all their will and leaving only servile flesh. Henceforth their minds were but units of the Worm's mind, for he could hear those co-infected, and project his images of desire and enticement, and so move his pawns with his bait.

The Worm was the soul of the Abyss, sparking all the gross evil into fantastic apparitions of endless ecstasy, of luxury and satisfying indulgence.

Vana was his most successful tool.

Morro danced thus with an arm of the Worm, and to him she was the ultimate in glorious womanhood, the utter depths of all delight dwelt in her eyes. But in those depths sheltered—the heart of the Worm.

* * *

Now, that same night, at the opposite pole of intent, a similar pattern of joy and revel was being enacted, in many details identical with the revels in the abyss.

For this night was the monthly meeting of the White Hearts, the time when their progress was reviewed, and their plans of ridding themselves of more of the weight of the Black Cross' brotherhood were talked of openly and generally.

Of course, specific plans were spoken in secret and frequent meetings; those who actually executed the assassinations, and not in general meeting. This was a revel, for fun and gayety, to make life livable. For few enough were the reasons in the life of the People of the Caverns to continue with life.

Among these courageous rebels, known to all as the White Hearts, the symbol by which they identified each other, was a girl known as Rouge.

Of beauty, even the kind we know up here, she was well possessed. Her eyes were dark flowers of wonder from the fields of night, her lips were rubies stolen from the Gods by a hero, her skin

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was white as a new-born soul. Her flesh was dimpled, soft, and distributed with due accord to equality for all, and injustice for none.

As she walked, her two round knees touched together in a way that made a man's heart turn over and over and nigh stop; and her fair bosom carried a hidden potent mysterious lightning which struck strange terror and utter defeat into all men.

Among those most stricken were two whom this strange lightning had well nigh devoured, left mindless automatons with but one thought in their minds, in their bemused brains but one picture—Rouge!

WHICH was a good thing, for the infection from which they suffered came from Mother Earth's ancient will, a device designed to perpetuate her servants. (Such is cavern belief.)

One of these two was named Mornon. His whole life had been a training in destruction, directed toward the end of wiping out the White Hearts. For Mornon was an operative of the Black Cross, insinuated into the secret gatherings of the Hearts by substitution for a man long dead.

The other was a very young Heart named Clan Harn, who had yet to prove his worth. Of slight build, he was fair as a girl, and his lithe body apt to be underestimated in strength. His eyes were blue, an unusual thing in the caverns, and his inexperience was shown in the innocent expression of his lips and round chin.

Mornon was a thick-set man, with a flowing mane of blond hair, bleached to that color as was the custom. His big nose was somewhat reddened by his attempts at being a good fellow in the drink shops. His mouth was apt to sneer inadvertently when he forgot himself, and his dark eyes were a bit too close together for comfort. But all in all, he was not a bad appearing man if you did not look too closely. He had won the support of Rouge's parents with many gifts and much talk.

Tonight, Rouge is dressed in her finest, and hoping against hope that the man to win her heart will show himself, though she fears it will not be.

About her extremely small waist is a glittering girdle of fine metal mesh. In the girdle are caught up the shining loops of dark yet transparent satin, through which gleams the flesh of her long full thighs and the man-ensorceling hips of her.

Along the swooning white column of her torso, bare above the low, narrow girdle, ran two tapering strips of black gleaming mesh, broadening over her full breasts' lush thrust.

The effect was somehow like the buds of two black gigantic lilies upheld on glistening black stems, sleeping lilies not yet born, and soon to open into mysterious, fecund flowerings.

The wide white rounds of her fine shoulders were shining naked, and a soft floating of black veil from her hair served to carefully silhouette the pure forms of her round arms.

Rouge stands in the doorway of the hall of the White Hearts, outlined by the Darkness of the Caverns, one hand holding up the red-looped velvet curtain as she looks in upon the gathered company of Hearts.

The men of the Hearts were caught upon her eye's glances as fish upon spears, and stood about the room transfixed and helpless.

The mystery and the power of her beauty, not yet come to full growth, but dark and vividly alive, dwelt most in her deep black eyes. But it also lay coiled and waiting in the midnight depths of her Medea's hair.

A magic was on Rouge, and no man

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could have done otherwise than did Mornon, who waited for some word to release the spell from his frozen limbs.

FROM her gleaming girdle, and over Rouge's smooth wide rounds of hips, two great feathery fronds of white hung upon the dark sheer transparence of her gown. As she stepped out from the dark doorway into the Company of the Hearts, her hip-sway was accentuated by the two great fronds, and that lightning that was hers alone rippled forth into the eyes of all men there.

Rouge was all woman and female magic, but she was young yet and needed wisdom and unshakable virtue to protect her from the evil of such as Mornon.

The spy watched her progress through the room, speaking now to this one, now to that, and he realized that every man there was wishing or planning or resolving to get her for his own. While every woman was turning over in her mind some method of neutralizing Rouge's magical effect upon the affections of her own man.

* * *

In the abyss, at the opposite pole of intent, proud Vana peacocked her beauty before Morro, the swarthy, stalwart son of Sin, and out of her eyes upon him looked the grasping self-love that was the spirit of the man-headed Worm. Reaching fire from Vana's flesh strove to consume the thing that was Morro, to leave only servile flesh, obedient, useful and worthless to all other things in life.

Morro embraced the deadly infectious lure that was the body of Vana, and through all his clean, self-willed body the spores of insatiate evil grew swiftly and spread from her to him.

He stared entranced into her eyes, his limbs moved obedient to hers in the dance. Vana knew (or that which seemed to be Vana knew) that this man was hers to use as she willed.

"Know you any of the people of the White Hearts?" asked Vana.

"Some few I know by sight, beautiful one. Why do you ask about those poor creatures?"

"Know you the maiden called Rouge? She is reputed to be even more fascinating than myself."

"I have seen her. She is beautiful, innocent and young. Not more so than yourself; the Lure of Sin, the Carnal Wisdom of all Delight, it is not in her!"

"She is not more attractive, then?"

"You are far more devastating to me," Morro answered, far more truthfully than he knew.

"I should like to look upon her. I hate her, even before I have seen her. I should enjoy destroying her, to lay her upon the Altar of the Worm, to hear her shrieks as the Worm advances, loosing upon her all the images of mind-penetrating ghoul-joy, as his mind enters hers and gives her the rapture of utter degradation, as her self is swallowed by endless corruption, as the pleasure of the worm in sadistic vampiric hunger dissolves her body and soul—as she shrieks and shrieks and the Brotherhood laughs in rapture and wallows in the vast erotic display of phantasmal imagery and mind-penetrating joy from the mind of the Worm."

"I can understand, though I have not participated in the Benefits, as yet."

VANA smiled winningly, her little pointed sharp teeth white on the dark red lips.

"I would like to go to the upper caverns above the Abyss and look upon this paragon. Would you take me, Morro? You must know the way, you have raided there, you have stolen and

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killed and poisoned our enemies up there . . . Take me, Morro!"

"Such a face as yours is far too well known to conceal from the hungry eyes of men." Morro had no great wish for the task. To him, Vana was a necessary part of his advancement in the world, he could not seem reluctant, he could not afford her antagonism.

"Well, of course! I shall go as an old hag, and you will be my aged paramour. No one would recognize me then!"

Morro laughed. "No, none could know then who you might be. But there is danger, you know. Some spy among us might tell the Hearts what we planned before we ever took the upward trail." Morro's big teeth glittered in front of Vana's eyes, and the dark enslaved heart of her missed a venomous beat and began to sing a song of elation. This man was one to desire, and Vana always got what she desired, one way or another.

So it was that Morro waited in Vana's luxurious chambers, while she put off the sadistic idiocy from her face, put off her evilly beautiful silken garments, and put on the disguise of a common hard-working old woman.

It was a difficult disguise for one who had never done any work of any kind. But Vana dirtied her hands, smeared upon her face a greying dye which gave an effect of age, and covered the graceful white body with voluminous and dirty black robes.

Up the long steep tunnels out of the Abyss of the Worm struggled Vana and Morro. That is a toilsome journey that takes days, and long hours of rest to relieve the weary limbs. Vana was soon panting for breath, and leaning her weight on Morro's arm.

Half carrying her exhausted body, Morro came at last to the streets of the common people who work in the caverns above the Abyss.

No one noticed the two dirty pilgrims, in their black torn robes; for all the people of the masses in that grim place wear dark unclean clothes, have dark unhappy thoughts marking their faces, and go sadly and stooped with the weight of their master's cruel tasks.

The only joy or happiness any of them have is their pride in the secret gatherings of the White Hearts, and few of them get to see these, for the sake of secrecy. All the rest are allowed but little to relieve the endless monotony of the dark and the toil. What little things of value they do gather together in secret hiding places are lured away from them by irresistible enticements, and these pleasures are such as to give little relief, because they lose their value in the madness of the joy.

IT IS the same as with you and I, we are offered gin and diseased women, but of true pleasure and healthy fecund expression of love, there is little enough of that to relieve us of our dull day's weight. As with you and I of the upper world, the people of the abyss above "*the Abyss*" are told that such things are to be had only in Utopia, and that is not yet.

Only are the vaster pleasures existent for the preferred of the Black Cross, and in the gatherings of the White Hearts, who know what healthy pleasure consists of, and dispense it to all who earn it by fighting successfully against the Black Cross. Because of the constant deathly struggle between the poles of intent, they cannot afford to give their pleasures to any but the heroes who risk death in their service.

The members of the Brotherhood of the Black Cross, and the members of the White Hearts, are even better off than we of the surface in their posses-

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sion of the secrets of deep and God-like pleasures. But only a few of the common working people are allowed to have the necessary mental equipment to win the rewards of the Hearts, or the respect of the Cross.

Vana and Morro passed the shops where things refused of the upper world are sold to the poor of the underworld for three prices, they passed the shops where women's bodies are peddled for half-price to all, they passed the opium dens' doors and the gin mills' doors and the doors of the sweat shops where men work away their lives for less than any slave elsewhere receives of food and fun. They passed the windows where are displayed the things no one can afford, like washing machines and refrigerators and waffle-irons from the upper world. These had been stolen during the days of the shortages above, when they were at a premium, but were now displayed more for the sake of bragging than in hope to sell—for no one in the underworld could afford to buy them. (That is, that needed them.)

They came at last to the secret doors where the Hearts passed in and out and Morro was forced to stop and wait there for that for which they came.

Mornon stood leaning against the carved stone pillars of the ancient doorway. Vana recognized him and made the sign of the Cross with her two fingers. Mornon answered furtively, for he did not know Morro, and too, others might see.

Thus was revealed to Morro that Mornon was a spy in the counsels of the Hearts, while to Vana was revealed the whereabouts of the doorway into the secret gatherings of the Hearts. To her this meant that knowing where the feet of Rouge would tread, she could place a trap for those feet.

As Vana and Morro stood talking for a moment with Mornon, the pitifully pale faces of the lost people of the underworld passed in joyless heavy parade, the dank odor of the stale air, swirled thick about them, the odors of cooking fires long dead and bodies long unwashed—the odors of the cremation furnaces—the odors of stale whiskey and poor perfume—and from the great carved doorway the heavenly odor of secret pleasure electrically vibrating. About their legs the fleas hopped and lit, and Vana cursed the bites.

AT LAST Rouge came out from the Portal of the White Hearts' secret home, and stood looking about in the dim light of the cavern street.

Her eyes fell upon the bright dress of Mornon, resplendent in pale gold brocade, red velvet pantaloons, and silver buckled shoes. She wondered why he was passing his time with such bedraggled derelicts as these two, the heavy grey dye making them seem in the last stage of some disease.

Vana caught her breath and bit her lip at sight of the vivid beauty of the young Rouge; and Morro, who had never before been close to the paragon, was struck with the potent lightning of her glance. Within his body began a counter-infection against the spreading permeating evil growth from Vana's Master, the Worm—an infection sourcing in the Mother of Earth herself. Morro's breath came and went with sudden haste, his heart to pound, and his mind began to peer out of the net Vana had cast about it.

Mornon wondered if he was going to be able to keep her from asking about these two, for he did not wish her sharp young mind to even begin to surmise who and what they might be.

He turned his back upon them scornfully, fearful as the act made him of Vana's pride, of her anger and her power; and strode to the side of Rouge

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where she stood by the great dark doorway. Offering his arm, Mornon bore Rouge away from the venom of the eyes of Vana.

For Mornon knew that once she had seen the beauty of Rouge, she would not rest till the young woman was dead.

But her eyes had seen enough, and her hate was pointing now as a compass to the North, always . . . Rouge. and so it would be till Rouge was dead.

Morro saw the hate sitting now upon that disguised face of Vana's. Hard as his heart had been caused to be by his life of hard struggle and evil deeds done by necessity among evil men and worse women, Morro felt strongly that this hate should be thwarted. But it did not occur to Morro that the thwarting was any of his business to accomplish.

CHAPTER II

Glory and pain, Death and the Worm, Lord of Evil, Cruciform

AFTER a furtive bit of sight-seeing among the worn ancient streets of the upper caverns, Morro and Vana took again the long trail to the depths.

And if Vana led a trusting dark-haired little boy by the hand; why is it not true that the Worm needs always young acolytes who may be brought up with a proper understanding of the importance of Evil in the Underworld? Does not the God of Lust himself reward those who bring the young to him before virtue ruins all their taste for the ways of Lust?

Morro reasoned that his poor mother probably had too many to miss one overmuch, anyway. Besides, who was he to say Vana nay?

That as a servant of Vana the child would be carefully corrupted into all possible indulgence, and complete vileness would be his character bothered Morro unduly, who was not used to having conscience pangs. But working within him was the potent and strange seed of desire from the fecund force expressed in the utterly lovely body of Rouge, and love changes a man. Working within him, too, was the fire of Evil lit by Vana's touch, finding in him perfect fuel. The flame-flowers of Evil were blowing through all the corridors of his mind, side by side with the strange new white blossoms of truth, and the mycelium of the two master of the two poles of intent were spreading through the self called Morro. A battle ground for two mighty forces, struggling for control of this future—and of the battle Morro was oblivious.

The brutal, carefree master of the trade of murder called Morro was becoming two people in one, both quite variant from the old Morro.

But to Morro, himself moved on, confident and capable of overcoming any threat in life that sourced in men; unmoved and untouched by soft sentiment, unloving and not needful of love, taking what he wanted where he found it and answering to none but the stronger, who were few.

To Morro, it was perfectly natural and to be expected that he should make love to Vana. He wanted her, that had always been sufficient reason for anything. That some new thing in him objected was strange! He did not listen. He watched Vana's eyes, waiting. She would desire him.

Vana left him, to go to her chambers upon their return. Weary beyond words, she flung herself upon, a couch, allowed her salves to undress and bathe her.

Over her sensual, overdeveloped body the slaves played the pleasure ray, the secret unguents of the Magis were

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rubbed into her skin. As they worked with her, making her again the beautiful Vana, pride of the Brotherhood of the Cross, into her inner ears poured the whispering of the far-off Worm who was herself once removed.

Carefully her mind answered the whispering, showing all she had seen in the caverns above the Abyss. Demandingly she asked the Worm to kill Rouge, who was the only threat to her supremacy in the field of beauty.

"Bring her to me, and I will take care of that," answered the Worm.

"With your help, bringing her will not be difficult."

"Come to me soon, and we will confer, partake of pleasures, and I will instruct you how to remove this Heart from your path. It is time their deeds were answered with deeds, the Heart has need of a little bleeding."

The reptilian presence left her mind, and Vana slept. In her sleep slaves caressed her body slowly, unceasingly, with the pleasure tools, so that her dreams were all afire with the ecstasy that is life to the Servants of the Worm.

Mornon, conducting the lovely Rouge to her home, was filled with dread that he was to lose this prize before ever he had tasted of her delightful femininity. Vana had set the glitter of her eyes upon the face of the girl in a way he knew well was fatal for a woman. Soon, soon, the blow would fall. He might not even stay the doom for fear of angering his own leaders, the High Priests of the Inner Council of the Cross.

In Mornon was little of courage as we see courage, but there was a cunning and a constant sense of desperation, of the shortness and unworthiness of

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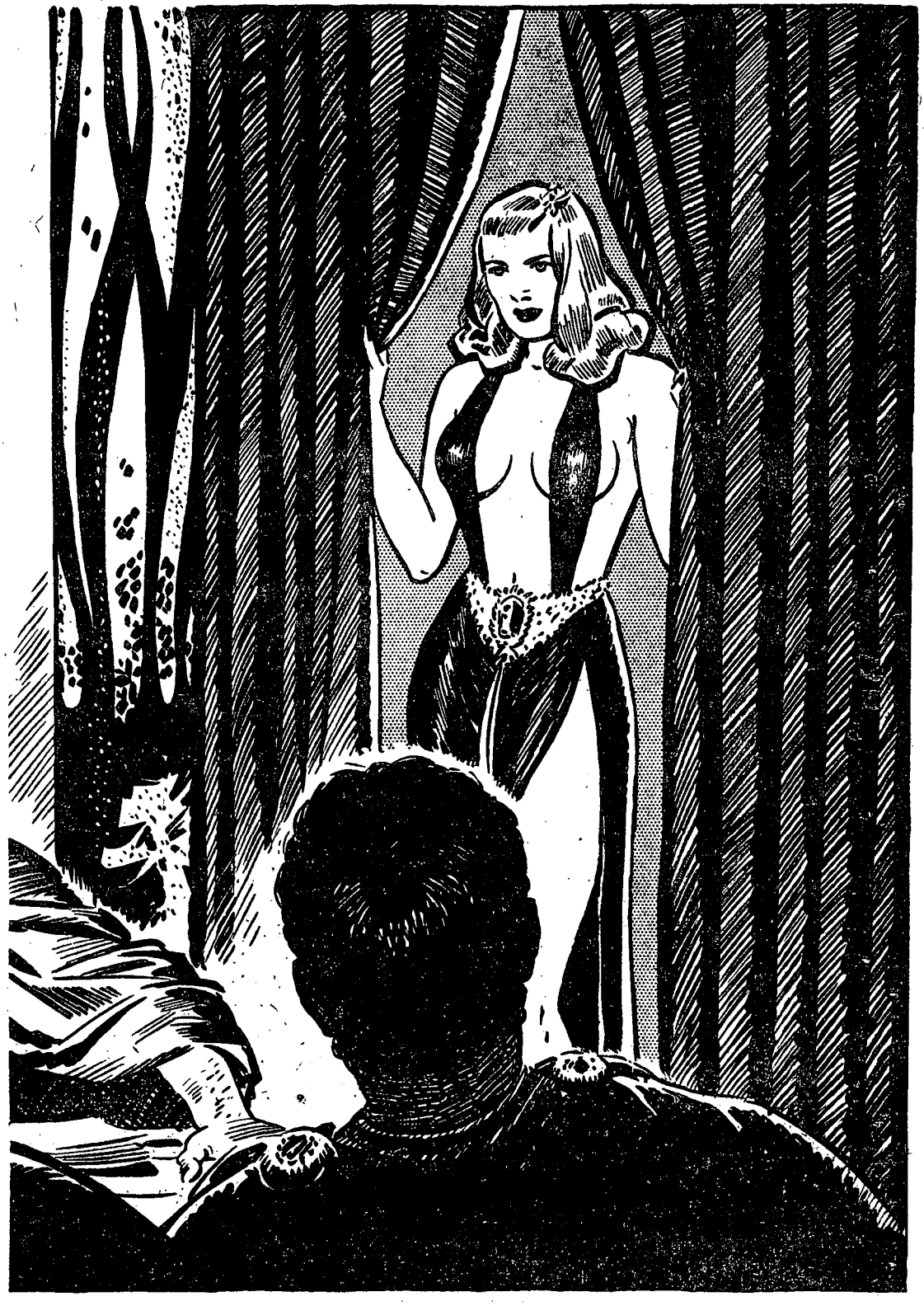

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life. To Mornon, life was a thing of little value, even his own. For he had not yet won to the great rewards of constant pleasure which were given to those who served the Worm faithfully and successfully, and for such as he, life is an impermanent thing. It was with this cunning born of a struggle for survival far more intense than our own that Mornon considered ways and means of circumventing the doom he knew Vana would fling upon Rouge.

SO IT was that Mornon stopped the wheels of the rickshaw, and asked Rouge's indulgence while he performed an errand. That errand was the hiring of a certain acquaintance to do for Mornon what he could not risk doing himself.

As the meek and stupid, nearly-blind and speechless human thing that drew the carriage in which they sat came abreast of an unlit crosswalk, out upon it swarmed three masked brigands, felled Mornon with a blow, and picking up the shrieking Rouge, made off with her.

Mornon picked himself up, paid off the poor frightened human horse, and made his way afoot to the home of the parents of Rouge. There telling his tale of abduction with great detail, he described how they were set upon by a dozen armed men and his blade struck from his hand before he had a chance even to draw it in defense of the poor girl.

* * *

At the same moment, far below in the Abyss of the Cross, Vana sent a messenger to Morro, summoning him. They met at the guarded entrance to the forbidden warrens beneath the loom of the vast stone cross—a thing mile-high.

Vana, the hooded, terrible, misshapen guardsmen knew well, and passed without question.

A WARM, perfumed, layered mist eddied about the two; tall gloomy Morro in his black slashed with crimson, and Vana like a flame of Sin beside him, her body visible through the scarlet clinging gown.

Through the mist they moved, toward . . . Morro wondered. For the first time he was questioning the wisdom of Evil! Naturally it was logic to take without giving, logic to remove the greedy mouths from life that there might be more for himself, but was it logic to follow the lead of one so famed for destruction? Why did he think himself excluded from her natural will to destroy all rivals, all others who might prove competitive or burdensome? And for the first time he saw the wisdom of the Hearts! He would not distrust the guiding hand upon his arm if it were the hand of the lovely young Rouge! But he *did* distrust Vana's hand upon his arm and all his trained faculties were alert to detect a trap did one exist. It could be that she needed him—but it could as well be that that need would be brief, as brief as the *Need* of the Worm for a victim—and himself the fulfillment of that need. Nevertheless he was going to follow, was going with her to consult with the Mind that was the Worm, that ruled here in the abyss. This could be his biggest step upward toward power under the Worm, his biggest chance for the rewards for which all the Brotherhood fought . . . Fought each other as well as the masses above the abyss, fought their rivals as well as the Hearts.

As they moved onward into the mists, a terrifying rumbling, a noise as of many great beasts struggling, a slobbering and writhing of vast serpentine

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bodies, a hissing and screaming . . . grew louder until the echoing multiplied within the rocky walls painfully. And Morro knew that he had entered the abode of the Worm, and that the weird race over which the Worm ruled as Lord were all about him, though as yet unseen because of closed doors.

A change had come over Vana's graceful, sensuously undulant body—a tense, desirous, lustful force spread through her, hastening her steps, making her face a mask of dreadful desire. Which was as Morro had expected.

But Morro had not expected *that face,* huge as the moon, rearing up from some vast hole directly in their path! The face of man? . . . No! It was only like man's face in that it had eyes, nose and huge sagging lips, great teeth and a drooling tongue hanging down, dripping with slobbering great wet sounds a gibberish unknown to Morro. From Vana, rushing forward and reaching to caress the great shaggy eyelids, stooping to kiss the lips huge enough to have engulfed her, came similar wet, unwieldly archaic words in a guttural rhythm—some strange ritual greeting of slave to master, it seemed. That head was taller from chin to brow than Vana's whole figure!

BEHIND the head, and downward into the heavy moist murk writhed the body of the Worm, vast turning coil upon coil, onward and around and down into the noisome warrens below. So *The Worm* had a head similar to man's, and in all other respects was truly a worm! Morro shuddered in revulsion, this was the chief for whom all the Brotherhood labored! What strange past alchemy of life's chemical secrets had produced this abortion, what mating of complete biological opposites in what den of awful lust had given birth to . . . *The Worm?*

Morro did not try to guess, before the vast power in those burning, turning gigantic human eyeballs in a head that filled the whole round cavern before him. Schooling himself to appear at ease, he walked slowly to stand beside the caressing, wanton figure of Vana, saying—

"I greet thee, Master, with all due respect, though the ceremonies attendant are unknown to me. Vana had brought me, for what purpose I know not."

The terrible eyes examined him, and the guttural slobbering voice made answer in the same incomprehensible tongue, to Vana. Vana turned, her face flushed and rapt, saying—"He understands, but his vocal organs do not allow speech in your tongue. He greets you, knows of you, and will counsel with me as to your future."

* * *

It was hours later that Morro staggered from the Presence, in the wake of a renewed and vital Vana. Now, he knew . . . *the secret!* The secret sheltered so carefully by the Elders of the Brotherhood from all minds but the few selected by the Worm. He knew the tremendous vista of the future, and the far infinitudes of the past, seen through the monstrous distortions of the eyes of the Ancient Worm. He knew as well Man's place in the Worm's plans for the future, and what man had been in the past. For the first time Morro was thinking of the other side—of the Hearts, who fought this worm. He understood now why they fought! Thinking of Rouge he knew there were other rewards to win than the pleasures offered by the Brotherhood for success.

Within his body the blood of the worm, injected during the ceremony as part of the price he must pay for Vana,

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struggled fiercely to grow and make him what he now knew Vana had become—a tool of the Worm. Against this fecund infection of giganticism, struggled the healthy normal cells of his mind and blood, *and the "peculiar" infection called love,* unknown to him.

He knew now that the gigantic monstrosities in the forbidden corridors of the abyss were men who had been similarly injected in the past—were what he would become in time, and what Vana would become. *Once, the Worm, too, had been a man!* This was the secret, and a shrieking something within him cried out against the weak submission which had allowed the awful blood to be placed directly into his veins.

THE things did not die, as men do, but lived on, becoming ever more and more monstrous. In the dim recesses of the labyrinths beyond the gigantic worm he had glimpsed the vast white belly of the oldest thing of all, known to him by rumour and legend as . . . the Mother of the Monsters.

Bearing within his body a terrific battle between the honest blood of Mother Earth, and this abortion to the abyss striving to take over the very structure and design of his inward cells and flesh and nerves—Morro walked beside the graceful swaying feminine lure of Vana, and inside him for the first time revulsion toward her shuddered into stark life! His most inward knowledge told him that when this revulsion died and he accepted Vana as beauty and woman once again—he would be forever lost! His struggle would be ended, and Mother Earth would be his Mother not any more. Instead his whole soul would obey and worship the . . . Mother of Monsters! His mind would obey the Worm, but his flesh would crawl and desire . . . *the Mother of Monsters!**

Suddenly to him the clear, fine beauty of Rouge, flaming in his memory, had become an unattainable purity which he might never touch—for his touch was now destruction to all normal beauty. Within him now he was conscious of the fire of evil infection first given him by Vana's fingertips upon his wrist—and that thing must never enter the blood of Rouge, the man that had been Morro swore!

Walking beside Vana, simulating affection, these hidden thoughts and slow-growing realizations became stronger, so that he had ever to exert greater strength of will to hide the thoughts in his head from Vana's penetrative mind.

Time had suddenly become to Morro all important, for he knew from the vast unconcealable thought of the Worm that *his hours* as a free agent of his own will *were limited.* If ever he meant to do anything of his own free will—the time had come, and would soon pass forever from him! "This is Evil," muttered Morro,—this is the reward for his risks and nerve wearing cunning deeds, this his fate under Evil! All that he had been taught he saw now suddenly as false logic, seeming true

**There are many rumors of human giants in the caverns, the details vary. This is one picture given by these rumors, though it is unsubstantiated by anything seen by myself. The giants of the caverns are supposed to be produced by growth-beneficial rays, and are of several types. There are other causes given for fecund giganticism, the elixirs of the Elder race developed for medical and health use, as well as weird potions of unknown nature taken by the cavern ignorants by mistake which result in monstrous deformations, perhaps due to age-deterioration of the compounds, or other unknown causes. It is quite true there are living in the caves some families very much deformed, with pig snouts, huge buttocks or other variations indescribable, like our six fingered families. I have seen some of these in the caverns with my own eyes . . weird monstrosities. I suspect our surface doctors through the centuries have weeded out monstrous births by killing new-born babies whose form is unnatural. This may be an unwritten law among surface medical organizations, to keep the race clean of such mutations.—R.S.S.*

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only in the light of ignorant cynicism, a fool's truth, and the little fact that Evil *gives only Evil* to all who contact it had been overlooked in his teaching.

So it was that the resolve to strike one blow of retaliation against the things that had done this to him was borne into furious life in Morro, and bidding Vana an abrupt adieu at the door of her chambers, not even looking at the inviting smile and lush, pink bosom of Vana as she stood in her doorway giving him leave to enter—he hurried away.

WITH curiosity Vana watched him go, wondering vaguely if he knew . . . what? Her own enslaved mind could not say the words of that "what." Something in her cried out silently against his going, but the Worm was sleeping, and no thought of action came alive. She turned and went in to the blue-lit chamber of glistening polished stone, her feet crossing the finely worked inlay of the floor leadenly, her graceful figure drooping tiredly onto her couch. Idly her hands toyed with the silk, figured over with the golden sign of the Worm, the cross and the coiled serpent-like figure about the cross, it's man's head incongruous above. Idly her empty eyes sought some joy in her home, and her slaves came to her, walking like zombies, soothing her shivering body with soft hands as they undressed her and placed her in bed. From her throat issued one scream, at last, like the breaking of glass under pressure, and she fell back unconscious. For she had been with the Worm, ministering to his appetites, and now was empty of life, and full of pain and loss her deadened mind could not feel.

Back in the corridors of the abyss, the Mother smiled horribly, and into her vast wet arms the Worm crawled, and slept.

Far up on the trail to the caverns above the abyss, Morro lay down in the hiding of some fallen boulders and slept off the weariness of the climb and of the ordeal.

* * *

In the gardens of green-food plants, where Mornon had managed to create a hideout by bribing the manager of the hydroponic, artifical-light greenhouse, filling one entire mile's-long boring—waited Rouge. About one ankle a light chain made her escape impossible, without hampering her movements greatly. Fearfully she waited, for she knew not who had been behind her seizure, and expected to learn the worst. About her drifted the orange and salmon seed-bulbs of the Flodraon, floating little prickle-surfaced balloons the size of her fist. Drifted and settled lightly about her, seeming loath to leave the spot she made more lovely with her dark beauty. Her eyes searched the far avenues among the great stems of the old food plants, the drooping elephant-ear leaves and twining, fruiting vines hiding all from her eyes but an occasional sere and lean-bodied old workman busily pruning the growths. That these ancient workmen were her guards she had no doubt.

Then he came, through the blossoms and dangling fruits and carefully latticed twinings of the crowding cultured growths, himself more gorgeously clothed than any of the brilliant hothouse blooms about him.

"Mornon!" Rouge cried. "You have come to release me. Who was responsible? Tell me, Mornon, why did this happen?"

But Mornon sat down casually on the white, sanded stone of the bench beside her, showing no haste or need to release the chain from her ankle.

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"There is much I must tell you, little Rouge, my innocent. There are things you do not understand."

BUT the keen mind of the girl leaped at once to his meaning. "You, you . . . are responsible! You have done this to me, who claimed to be so firm a friend!"

"In a way, I am responsible, my pigeon, and in another way—I am not so at all. I have brought you here to save you from a very real threat by hiding you. Since there was no time to explain or overcome your objections and those of your friends—it looks as though my intentions were the worst. I have not had time to think that out."

"What danger threatens me that is not always threatened? I suppose you will tell me the slaves of the Worm have chosen me as a victim, and there was no hope for me. As if I didn't know they would kill all the Hearts if they could!"

"There is one you do not know among them, whose eyes I saw looking upon you with a decision in them. And when Vana decides about a woman, that woman shortly dies. Dies horribly, dear Rouge. I saw Vana looking upon you so."

"When? Where?"

"Do you remember the aged couple to whom I was speaking when you came from the doorway of the Hearts, just yesterday?"

"That woman! That . . . is Vana! Mornon, they were so close and you did not denounce them, you did not speak! Why? I don't understand your meaning. . . . Ah, ah! You fiend! You are one of them! A spy, and I trusted you! Ah, Mother of Beauty, how could you have been born of life?"

Rouge spat toward him, wetting his sleeve. He only wiped it away with a smile, saying, "Yes, little pigeon, I am a Black Brother, Servant of the Black Cross, and the enemy of such stupid human groups as the White Hearts. But that does not prevent me desiring you, nor laying plans to get you. And no strutting peacock like Vana of the Worm's own petted following shall balk me of you. Not she, nor her bloated Master, nor the whole damned Brotherhood shall take you from me."

Even as he spoke the words, a sound made him turn his head to his left, and with a gasp he sprang forward, stooping, his hands clutching for the poniard at his belt. But he was too late!

The hilt of the weapon caught him just below the ear, and he pitched on forward to lay still for a minute—long enough for Morro to stoop and remove from his hand the blade, to run his hands swiftly about Mornon's clothing and take therefrom several small cylinders and a half dozen vials from different hiding places in his clothes. Then Morro stood back, gazing not at his victim but at Rouge, and there was a desperate hunger in his gaze that she could not understand. It was as though he looked upon her with the eyes of a man about to become hopelessly blind. Trying to fill his eyes and memory and brain with her, to last him for an age of darkness and loneliness.

"WHO . . . who are you, dark stranger?" Rouge stood with her lovely white arms lifted, her torn dress exposing her bosom, her hands held as to hold off attack. About her ankle the chain made the picture of the fearful slave complete.

Morro stood thus for long minutes without speaking, just looking at the young, not yet full-blown beauty of her, feeling the cleanness of her with his eyes and his telepathic sensing.

"I know who you are, Rouge, and I

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came here especially to get you from this creature who has stolen you from your home. You must trust me, young woman. You must trust me as though I were God himself come to earth again, or I can do nothing for you. And above all you must never let your hands touch me, even for one instant. For the infection grows in me, and what it is I do not fully know, or whether you can get it from me irrevocably or only from the Worm."

"Trust you? Not touch you? You speak in riddles, man! If you are a friend, strike off this chain and take me to my home. If you are enemy, why have your say—but do not expect listening."

"There is much you do not know, Rouge. How can I give you what I learned with the loss of myself? How can one ever tell anyone such a thing as can not be understood?"

The dark virility and sincerity of this hairy-skinned fierce stranger struck strange emotions into the unprepared perceptions of the young beauty. In spite of herself she was terrifically intrigued by Morro. He stood clad entirely in black, the scarlet and gold trimmings of his clothing all cast aside for serious work—and for *his* work no clothing is so good as solid, dull black, unseeable except at close quarters. Stark, the black figure of muscled strength stood at ease, the swarthy, dark-mustached face and piercing eyes looking out from the black, heart-shaped space which was the only part not covered by the fabric. A thief's costume, it was, she knew—none would wear it but assassins, murderers—or spies from the Abyss here on some errand that would not stand the sight of any eye. That Morro had reason to fear the eyes of the Hearts she did not know—but surmised that it was from them he was thus hidden in this costume. The upper curve of the space where his face looked out was a turned-up mask, lying upon the dark curls of Morro's hair with a capping effect of mystery and terror.

"Who are you, and why are you here?"

"Give me but time to lash this fallen friend of yours, and I will explain."

MORRO fastened the hands of the unconscious man with his black leather belt, and then sat beside Rouge, taking the links of her chain in his hands and beginning to cut the link through with a file as he talked . . .

"In the Abyss, Rouge, children do not grow up carefree as you did. We grow up struggling to stay alive, and learning every evil trick of life quickly or dying of the spleen of some devil before we chance to learn how to avoid him. We learn to think evil only, early, so I did not understand what the Worm meant to the Hearts until I went with Vana yesterday—and learned a thing I had not known before about the Abyss. The Worm allowed me to look into his mind, perhaps unknowing my peculiar nature and powers. I learned what the Worm and the other undying monsters of the Abyss really are! I learned—*too late!* For his blood was placed in my veins, and mine in his—as a pledge of loyalty. But in truth, when that happened, I became a thing that will grow to be what the Worm is today—a terrible monster who knows only that he must live, no matter why."

"I have heard the Hearts speak much of the monsters of the Abyss, but there is little we know openly about them. Yet, if you are one of the Brotherhood, why did you strike Mornon as you did? He had just confessed, practically, to the same thing."

"I came to you, Rouge, because I

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wanted to save you from what I knew would happen to you because of Vana. That Mornon had beaten me to it, I found soon enough. Thus I traced you by Mornon, who is not so subtle as he would think. I came because, soon . . . I will be a thing, a slave of these monsters that prowl the Abyss. And I do not like to think of that. I want once before I become something else than man, to do one good deed. I wanted to give you love without demands, without payment, just as the "foolish" Hearts do for those they love—once—to make sure that they were wrong, as I have been wrong about the rightness of Evil. Truth is, I suppose, that my first sight of you awoke love in me, and my first contact with the Worm made me realize I was soon to be incapable of love. So I came to you somewhat as a dying man might come for a drink of water. Not of much use to me, but it could taste very fine."

"Your words are not clear. You say the Worm was once a man, as we are? That you will become as the Worm, in time, because of his blood being placed in your veins."

"They are a mutated form of man-life—the radiations of the Abyss have caused their peculiar and monstrous growth—and this cell that has become the cell of their body is not human. The change in the cell that causes growth to make them what they are—is caused by a certain strange heavy element which is in their blood from certain of the caverns where they bed. This it is that causes the growth. It is a radiant response—catalyst to the chemistry of growth—causing the chemical changes of growth to speed up—but in a different way toward a different result than our own life."

"I suppose what you say is true, but it smacks of the black magic of the Abyss, to me, and your words are but a covering of the evil with meanings less awful."

"IT is what I read in the unwatchful mind of the Worm, and he should know. It is the way he understands the monsters of his following, and why they exist. It is his plan to infect all men, in time, with the blood—for then they are responsive to his mind—a strange result of the blood infection makes them akin, they hear his thought, while their own, the result of their own natural thought cells—slowly dies and is replaced by his. His thought is not the same, but is a thing that can exist in many minds at once. Because he and the mother of monsters gave birth to the others, they are part and parcel, the same thing, in the way that the cells of our body are slaves of our mind, so are all subsequent monsters part and parcel of one animal, and the head of that animal—The Worm!"

"Why do you tell me this?"

"Because I too will soon be thus lost to man. Before that happens, I want to strike one blow for men as they are now. I want to make sure the Hearts understand what it is they fight, and what the Hell's brew of the Abyss really means. For all my life I have served the Brotherhood, not knowing the nature of the Worm, or what he meant to men. Now I know, and know that I have been a fool, serving an enemy of my own best interest. That has ended, but too late. I am lost!"

"You come to me? Why?"

"The eyes of Vana told me you were doomed, and the acts of Mornon told me that if she did not kill you he would take you for his own. To stop these two I come to you, I offer you only a sanctuary."

"Sanctuary! Where?"

"In the Abyss, in disguise, no one would expect to find you there, or look

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for you."

"And after the metamorphoses of the Worm's blood has come over you—you will know where I am, and reveal me to your masters. No, stranger, this you cannot do. I will go to the leaders of the Hearts and tell them what you have told me."

"The change is very gradual, and takes years of life. The only difference is that one does not grow old; instead one grows monstrous, in a lifetime the change begins to show, and in two lifetimes one becomes a monster. It is slow, inexorable and complete. I know, I have seen them."

Rouge stood up, for Morro had now filed through the chain, and she was free. At their feet Mornon glared up, and thrashed at the binding of his arms and feet.

"Kill this man I must!" Morro looked down at Mornon, and a smile, grim and expectant of pleasure in the deed, spread over his face, so gloomily handsome above the dark fabric covering his muscled limbs and brawny chest. The muscles flexed on his hairy wrists, his hands clenched and unclenched, he bent over the prostrate spy.

"No! I forbid it!" Rouge was too young in the ways of the warfare to stomach the cold-blooded killing. "Take him to the Hearts' meeting place, there he will be tried and condemned properly."

"I cannot take him or you there, they would kill me, Rouge. They know me for an old enemy, and there is a special reward for my death among the Hearts. I have killed many of them, you know."

ROUGE pressed her slim hands to her brow in thought. "If we leave him here, bound, you can conduct me to the doorway of the Hearts' place, and then flee as I enter. I will send men to bring Mornon."

Morro knew what would happen, but nodded. Together they went along the soft mossed paths beneath the old fruit plants, the small, dried gnome-like men of the caste of gardeners watching them pass with non-committal glances. They knew—and they knew it was none of their business. To one of these Morro tossed a gold coin as they passed, and whispered a word—"Let not his friends release him till we come again."

The man took the coin and bit it, and did not say a word. But his eyes upon Morro were not cold, and shone with a certain thing that Morro knew.

As they left the bright yellow light of the plant cavern, Morro tossed about Rouge's naked shoulders his own black enveloping cloak, and walked beside her like night beside beauty, both swathed in shadows and their two faces so different, yet alike in their troubled beauty, broad brows and dark curls and gleaming dark eyes, very like brother and sister they were, children of the same mother, and that Mother, darkness herself.

As they neared the street of small shops where the stone carved antique entrance to the Hearts' rendezvous dominated the whole tunnel, Morro left her, taking his cloak without a word, disappearing into the shadows the way he had come.

Dropping the hood over his face, Morro drifted swift as the wind back to the plant cavern, unseeable and unseen by any. He meant to finish the job he had left undone at Rouge's insistence. He meant to let the life out of the spy's carcass before he had time to arrange for Morro's own death. He did not believe much in Rouge's plan for justice for the spy. He could depend on his own hand, not knowing whether these Hearts were swift and sure or not. He had never feared them, found them easy to elude.

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Again in the sheltered hidden bower where he had found Rouge awaiting Mornon, he saw at once that Mornon was gone. Sprawled beside the white bench lay the gnome-like figure of the man he had paid to watch him, a knife in his back and his own short curved blade in his hand, the edge bloodied as though in dying he had struck one blow.

"The trail," murmured Morro. "I must watch the trail to the Abyss, and stop this spy before he finds a way to tell the Worm of what I revealed to Rouge. Before he sets Vana against me . . ."

Now running like the wind, Morro sped along the deserted streets of the upper city, and entered the dark burrow that led to the downward trail. All that day he raced downward, stopping again where he had slept before, hidden again behind the fallen stones. Crouched, like a coiled spring he waited, for he could not be far ahead of Mornon, or may have missed him altogether.

He had hardly taken his place when the footsteps sounded above him, coming down at breakneck speed. Mornon was not staying to argue with the Hearts the merits of his case.

AS THE running man came abreast of Morro, he paused, sinking down exhausted to the rocks where they flattened out in a small platform. It was the usual place for rest in the climb or descent, and it offered natural defense against surprise either from above or below. But Mornon's pursuit was already present and waiting. Wriggling silently as a snake, Morro slid nearer, his narrow foot-long poniard in his hand. One blow, just above the jut of the collar bone, a pull and a twist to open the arteries—the deed would be done.

With the darting speed of a bat Morro sprang, his cloak floating behind him black as death's wings, the bright blade and intent eyes all that Mornon saw as he twisted at the sudden sound. Mornon dropped and rolled, the first strike failed, and Morro whirled to meet the counter. But not for Mornon. He had gained his feet, was running like a frightened deer across the stone plateau and down the trail to the safety in the Hell below. Morro darted after, but fear lent speed to Mornon's feet, and Morro settled down to the hour's long pursuit now needed to overtake and conquer a foe now fully aware of his whereabouts.

Down they fled, like two mad souls condemned to Inferno, fleeing the wrath of God. Morro flung off his cloak, and ran only in the close fitting, all over unseeable black, his face still and intent, his mouth open and nostrils quivering in the excitement of the man-chase. Only his white, mustached face, barred with the heavy brows, and the two white, reaching hands, the bright blade closer, closer—that was all that Mornon saw as he looked back.

Mornon's bright clothing became torn as he banged against the walls in his speed, his feet bruised, his face dewed with sweat, his breath a fire in his throat. And in his mind a vast surprise and wonder — that one of the Brotherhood should be seeking to slay him! It could only be for the sake of the girl—unless Morro were a White spy in the camp of the Brotherhood.

Or could he be Vana's own assassin, sent to slay Rouge, and finding him in possession of the girl, deciding to kill him too? Morro had been seen with Vana, that must be the answer! That would mean that when he left Mornon with the girl, he had killed her, left her, come back to kill Mornon. But why had he not killed them both and left

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them there in the bower of the plant cavern?

MORRO sped after the fleeing scoundrel, in his heart a desperation mingled with the new strange tug of the metamorphoses of the blood. Even as he ran he speculated on the nature of the change going on within him. He knew that he was becoming now a part of an organism, a thing like an anthill, composed of individuals, but ruled by a single one-purposed mind, the Worm. That this change was the natural outcome of a cell-change caused by some chemical catalyst, a self reproducing compound, perhaps, like a virus—on the line between life and inorganic chemical. That the change was a mutation of a special monstrous kind, changing man into beast, and beast retaining thinking capacity while losing self to the mental control of the mighty Master Worm, the thing with a great man's head that had somehow mastered the vagaries of the change and emerged—the Master of them all.

Within him he could feel the tug of this control, slowly taking over, replacing his own purpose with its own, perhaps quite unconsciously to the Worm as well as to most who underwent the change.

This new purpose was yet his own, and it too was determined to kill Mornon, but in quite a different way—by taking him to the Worm for injection of the blood. Even as he ran, the two purposes conflicted in him, and his keen awareness of the subtle tug of alien thought told him that if he was still Morro he would thrust the blade in his hand into Mornon many times, while if he was now a tool of the Worm, he would but knock him unconscious and bear him at once to the cavern entrance hard by the foot of the Black Cross.

But chance intervened, and even as he was about to overtake Mornon, his foot turned on a small stone and threw him to the ground. He lay there ruefully, watching the retreating Mornon running like a man pursued by the devil. He laughed at the furiously pounding feet, and lay still, rubbing his injured ankle.

He knew that now he had but a short time to live, if Mornon told his story to either Vana or the Worm.

CHAPTER II

Of secret lips, hidden altars, and ancient chants.

AFTER conferring with the Heart leaders, Rouge emerged from the doorway of the Hearts' central meeting place. Glancing up and down the near-deserted street, she stood waiting the escort the Hearts had voted to give her after her relating the defection of Mornon and the warning of Morro as to the Nature of the Worm.

Across from her several shadows stirred into life, sprang swiftly across the narrow way, popped a large black bag over her head, and carried her back again into the invisibility of the black shadows and black coverings. These were Vana's servitors, sent by her as Morro had foreseen. She had meant to have Morro lead this raid, but his sudden departure on unannounced business of his own had left her to her former resources. She had many.

As the Hearts assigned to accompany Rouge emerged, buckling on their weapons and looking about for the girl, they found no sign of her. The fair-haired, slight Clan Harn, one of these guards who had asked for the assignment, fell to the worn paving, writhing in sudden grief and uncontrollable self-vilification.

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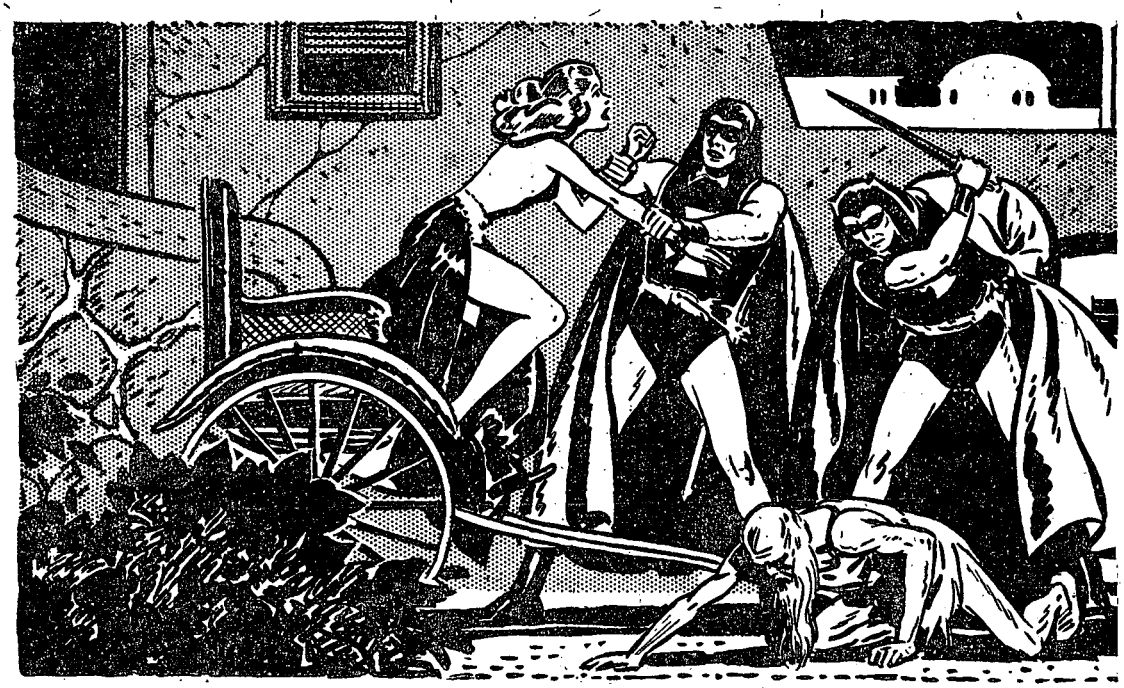

"How did we let her out of our sight? Why did she slip on ahead? What possessed the girl? . . ." he sobbed, and the hung heads about him emphasized the justification for his fiery denunciation of their carelessness. Few of them had believed or even heard Rouge's account to their leaders, had not understood the seriousness of it.

"This hour I leave for the Abyss. By the Black Cross I swear it—I will not return without Rouge and the honor of the Hearts." Clan Harn's voice was bitter, harsh.

"You will not return at all. You are too young and untrained in the ways of the Brotherhood to penetrate there in safety. Leave the job to older heads!"

"As I left her safety to older heads, eh? No, not again! From now on I trust in my own hands and my own head. I will bring back the beauty and the purity of the finest of the Hearts' women—or I will not return alive."

The older men left the youth where he lay on the worn, dusty pave; scattered, blades in hand, searching the shadows and doorways on each side the street for some sign of the girl's captors. Their search was fruitless and when they returned Clan Harn was not among them.

Clan Harn was far down the long steep tunnel to the depths of the Black Cross, running steadily and tirelessly, his ears sharp to hear the slightest sound that would tell him of the quarry he knew must be ahead. Hour after hour went by, and his racing feet slowed, his mind began to assure that no burden-bearing man alive could be ahead of him. So he must lie in wait, be ready for them when they came. So it was that he came to the platform where it was the custom to rest during the long climb or descent—and concealed himself behind the very rock so recently used by Morro himself.

BELOW him, Morro picked himself up, limped painfully back up the

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trail he had raced down but a moment before. He could not return again to the quarters given him by the Brotherhood, not until he had learned whether Mornon had gone to Worm with his tale. Until he learned whether Mornon had been too afraid to reveal his attempt to kidnap Rouge to save her from Vana to speak of Morro's attack—not until he learned whether hate of him would override Mornon's fear of Vana's reprisal—could he return to the Abyss. Until he had learned the full details of Mornon's actions, he was a man without a home either in the Abyss or above it among the cavern people.

So it was that Morro limped up to the rock concealing Clan Harn and sat down upon it, his back to the enraged youth behind it. His usual caution was nullified by the fact that he had just quitted that same hiding place, but a few minutes before, and it did not occur to him that an enemy would have chosen it for concealment in such short order.

Even as his buttocks relaxed upon the cool stone, a knife tip pricked his back, and a cold steel voice startled his ears with its chilled, murderously angry tone.

"Speak, son of sin, or forever remain silent. Who are you? Why the black clothing of the assassins of the Brotherhood, and what do you await here?" Clan Harn could not have said what held his hand from striking at once, except that he wanted more than life to know the whereabouts of his beloved Rouge.

Morro, in spite of the sure menace in that young cold voice, chuckled. "Son of sin, eh? If you knew how true that was, and how little I care now if that blade sinks home or remains where it is . . ."

Clan Harn shoved the sharp point deeper, so that Morro groaned in spite of himself. "Speak, killer, or don't! It is all one to me."

"As to me. But first tell me why you are here? Since I must die, it mat-

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ters not what you say. It might so happen that our paths lie parallel instead of cross-wise."

"I am here to catch the abductors of Rouge. They must pass this way to reach the Brotherhood."

Morro gasped in sudden realization. "Rouge! But, I myself saw her safely to the door of the Hearts' center. How can she have been stolen so soon, and again? Or are you speaking of Mornon, whom I chased down that trail but minutes ago?"

Morro felt the tension in the arm holding the knife relax, the point crept imperceptibly backward out of his flesh.

"You know Rouge? You have helped her? Then you must be the man she spoke of, Morro of the Brotherhood, who turns against the Worm because of the Blood ceremony. Who told us what it means and what it is! Hah!"

"Speak on, man, and be quick! How come she to be lost again? Tell me!"

"She came out from the meeting house alone, stifled with waiting for us to conclude our foolish talk and see her home as we were ordered. We followed her, too full of talk to hurry properly. In the instant between her emerging from the door and our own emergence—she disappeared. I hurried to this trail and raced down as fast as my legs would carry me. But I either passed them in the dark, or they have not yet taken the trail downward."

"Then they will be along, carrying her. Those were Vana's own assassins, and no others! She is vain of her own beauty, tries to have all other beautiful women done to death as quickly as she may. Wait until we have sunk the blade into the bodies of the scum, stranger, before you kill me. I have an interest in thwarting Vana, for I know better than any what she is. Rouge is one of the underworld's creatures who shall not grace the Altar of the Work."

CLAN HARN withdrew his knife slowly, sank again to a recumbent position.

"I believe you, Morro, but only because Rouge believed you and I heard her tell of what you did for her."

"You love her, youth?"

"What man does not love her? I love her more than life!"

"Aye, she is love, in person. I love her more than death, and that is true. But soon, I will love death more than her."

"You will become one of the monsters. I heard the words of Rouge, telling what you learned. That is horror. But what did you expect, serving Evil?"

"I was brought up to be what I am, youth. I did not know better. There are lies that *you* believe, unknowing. Scores of such lies distort your mind, and all others."

"But you have learned that the Hearts are right. We expect reward for effort and we get it. You get the Blood! Small reward!"

"I have learned that I am wrong. I have not learned that anyone is right about anything they believe."

As they talked, there came faintly to their ears the small scuffling sound of feet on the hard, dark trail above. They sank to silence, and Clan Harn made no protest as Morro drew his poniard and dropped his face-mask, making himself unseeable in the faint glowing light. As he squatted, he rubbed dirt upon the backs of his hands, an unconscious habit, making even that light surface dark and invisible. The blood began to pump in his veins and the old thrill of the kill prickled ecstasy up and down his back with cold delightful feet. These were old sensations, the thrill of danger, the hard feel of the poniard hilt in his fist, the other hand sliding down to draw a weighted sap from a pocket in his leg covering. These men

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of Vana's were seasoned killers, not to be taken with any flick of the wrist. Morro knew that his blood would flow, but luck might preserve his life. It did not matter, he remembered with the new fatalism come upon him since the Worm's blood had entered his veins. Death was better than growth into another like the Mother of Monsters.

Four black shadows, bearing on their four shoulders a burden, wrapped in black and around it coarse ropes spiraled. In the dim uncertain light they were no more than wraiths, but the eyes of the two who waited were bred to that darkness, and as they sprang, the two nearest received their blades in breast and side, Morro's a cunning, wide ripping blow that dropped his man in bloody death. But Clan Harn's wider blade struck bone, slid off, making only a great sudden red gash but doing little real harm. The burden they bore bumped to the ground between the three as they sprang back, steel glittering in their hands. Morro knew by the strange loathing in him as well as by their bloated, huge, boneless appearance, that these were men who had received the blood long ago. The tug of *the purpose* in his mind near paralyzed him with command to desist, feeling much like a reluctance to plunge the knife into his own breast. These bloated powerful men were a part of him, were his own evil flesh and blood!

BUT he fought the inward battle and won, and his swift feet circled surely, his blade flickered with all its usual cunning, and again a tall figure slumped, toppling to weary knees, the face-mask wet and soggy with the vomited blood.

Morro spun to the third, before the second had quite fallen across the bound figure in death.

Clan Harn blocked the steady thrusting attack of his own huge opponent with his coat-wrapped forearm, the knife ripped, his arm was wet with his own blood. His heart ached with envy of his ally's swift, sure fighting, as himself stumbled back and back, evading the powerful slash and thrust as he waited a chance to drive his own blade home. The reality of this grim combat to the death was very different from practice, Clan Harn was learning.

The figure on the ground gathered itself into a compact bundle suddenly, the legs drawing up over the body. Some loosened wrapping must have given Rouge sight of part of her surroundings, for suddenly her legs lashed out, her feet caught Clan's opponent mid-way in the back of the legs, sending him toppling off balance. Clan sprang upon him, this time his knife ripped hard and true like Morro's, with perfect understanding of the force needed to cleave bone and sinew, and the blood gushed from the man's ripped neck, the whole side of his throat wide-spouting, the gash extending on down and across his breast. The ripped-off black fabric left the grey-white, puffed skin bare, and Clan Harn glimpsed the loathsome quality of the life he fought, and retched, bent over, sick. Then the white place was covered with pouring blood, and the thing fell on its side before him.

Clan leaped over the fallen body, standing wide-legged at the side of Morro, trying to get a thrust in before Morro finished him. In desperation the huge man thrust and stabbed, while his other hand he held poised high, heavy leaden sap waiting. He backed away, turned as if to flee, but spun back as Morro leaped and brought the heavy, leather-wrapped club down on Morro's skull. As Morro fell, he turned to Clan, grinning wolfishly. The boy fought fiercely, cleverly, but the strength of

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the man was too great; Clan was wearying, staggering from his long run and the sudden exertion after. The knife thrust into his side, and even as he reached to stab through the opening left by the hand busy in his vitals, the club crashed above his ear—he knew no more.

The big, strangely shaped man picked up the bound figure of Rouge, went on his way down the trail, leaving the five figures where they lay. He did not even examine them to make sure of death—he did not care. His business was getting the girl for his Mistress, Vana, and that was the same as obeying the Worm, which was the same to him as his own will.

VANA rose at the message of her slave, stood naked for a time before the great oval mirror, ringed with serpents of bronze, admiring her own lithe beauty. Then she slipped on a robe of black velvet, striped over with thin gold embroideries, the sleeves long drooping wings from which her hands and smooth forearms moved soft and startling white. Belting the robe about with a wide jeweled leathern dagger-belt, she left the dim sleeping chamber and confronted the bloody servant standing stooped with weariness above the bound figure of Rouge.

With a sharp triumphant cry Vana squatted upon her heels beside the swathed bound bundle of soiled black, lifted back the cloth from over Rouge's face. Grinning, her lips pulled back over her teeth fiendishly, Vana stared down at the prize, and Rouge looked up at her captor curiously, unafraid, but her pink cheeks pale as death, and her eyes shadowed and sunken with strain.

"Hah, the Hearts' pride, the beauty whom they brag puts Vana to shame. Not long will it be said that Vana has an equal! Soon, soon, the Worm himself shall master you, shall make of you . . . Do you know, little innocent, what the Worm does with prey?" Vana's shrilly gloating voice ended in a half-chuckle, deep in her throat, a sound that chilled Rouge to the heart.

"I know not, nor care. You are a mad woman, unaccountable in reason for your acts. So are all the Brotherhood, reared to serve a monster whose intelligence is largely a product of their own insane imaginings. All your gloating cannot make me think there is more to you than purely stupid insanity." Rouge's clear, sweet voice, without a tremor in it, rang in the over-ornamented den as out of place as a choir-boy's singing in a brothel.

Vana, enraged by the girl's calm contempt, slapped her suddenly hard in the face. Her hand left a sharp red outline upon the white cheek. Rouge only looked at Vana, her gaze saying only—"What next?"

Regaining control, Vana rose smoothly, her naked legs sharply outlined against the now half-open robe, and striding to a locked metal stand, pressed some hidden release, so that the hammered metal door swung open. From the numerous little drawers she took three articles, turned to the slumped figure of her servant.

"For your success in this work I reward you, Olar Handra. Here is a ring, show this to my slave master, he will let you choose from my female slaves any one that pleases you. She is yours. This little golden key is to that secret place you know about, you may take her there for your pleasure. Return the key when you are ready for work again. This bag contains coins, enough to pleasure yourself for a month with care. Is it sufficient?"

THE man opened his mouth to speak, but weariness overcame him, and

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even as he reached to take the objects from her hands, he slumped unconscious to the floor. Vana bent and examined his wounds, long deep slashes across the ribs, upon the forearms, and one thrust deep below his ribs, still bleeding slowly. She made a mouth of disgust at the mess on the carpet, and stepping to the doorway, tapped a little golden bell with a hammer. Two huge black-skinned slaves came at the sound, running silently on naked feet, and falling to their faces on the floor before Vana.

"Take this man and care for him. Get the slave-doctor to attend his hurts. When he is on his feet again bring him to me."

As the blacks bore the big ungainly form of the assassin away, Vana put her three rewards back into the curiously worked metal stand, her eyes absent with far-sight. She was hearing the far powerful stirring of the life-thought in the Worm's mind, and her body shuddered slightly at the strong pictures aroused—weird, alien pictures of un-nameable vices, the dreaming worm was thinking of Vana in his sleep, and over her body stole an awful distant caress, and her lust pictured the vast bloated inhuman hands of the Worm sliding over her body while her mind reveled in the telesent joy-sensing of the locked intents, overcoming distance with evil kinship, overcoming human instincts with the powerful and different fecund lust of the Monster race breeding in interwound masses at the foot of the Black Cross.

Vana's lips murmured a message to her distant Master, and her mind heard his sleeping listening: "I have for you a sacrifice more delectable than any ever enjoyed by the Masters before. This captive Heart maiden will pleasure you beyond the sense's reach with her young untouched essence of life. This blood will make the blood of the Worm boil in new fecundity—you should see her!"

"Show me her face—her form—taste for me her blood . . ." the vast distant mind-voice commanded Vana, and Vana obeyed. With her dagger she slashed away the black wrapping and the clothing of Rouge, leaving her there on the floor naked, and bound.

Her possessed eyes brooded over the smooth white beauty long and intently. Then she bent, sinking her white teeth in the throat, sucking out the blood, so that the Master might savor the taste afar.

"Bring her soon, but first prepare her carefully for the ceremonies. She will be a fine subject. Fine, fine . . ." the vast inhuman travesty of thought drifted away from it's clutch on Vana, and she rose from the naked girl, kicking her in the side spitefully. For Vana served the Worm as a part—but when not possessed she was her evil self wholly. As she left the chamber, she locked the door on the bound girl. Vana stood again before her mirror, in her own bed-chamber, stripping off the black and gold robe, sliding her hands sensuously over her smooth slim body, murmuring—"Now, now there will be no rival. Vana stands supreme—until the change comes upon me, and I go to join the Worm forever, in his halls."

VANA looked curiously for a time at the hybrid's grotesque reptilian mottling on her ankles, where the change was creeping upward, slowly, slowly, caressing with her fingers the strange oily glistening of the mottled skin there, wondering what she would be like when the change was completely upon her. Beside her would be Morro, her weird heart murmured, to walk side by side with her into the vast

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coiling nest of growth and fecund giganticism together, to face together the strange intertwined lives of the units of the Worm. For she knew, too, that the life of the things of the secret warrens of the Abyss was not human in any way, and that the human ego perished in that strange mutant growth spawning ever vaster blasphemies upon the pattern of life in the evil, coiling, interlocked unceasing motion of the multi-bodied Worm. Herself would be one of the Worm's bodies, locked with the rest in that unceasing embrace, and her mind joying with the Worm's in ever-mounting triumph over other life. Beside her would be Morro, his handsome figure transmuted into weird male beauty reptilian . . . Vana turned from her mirror, her hands slid from her thighs, down her long lovely legs, touching the skin of her ankles with a shivering joy that was yet repulsive to something in her yet human. From afar, as she slid her body across her bed with a snake-like wriggling possessing her, she could sense always a smell like alien musky flesh, the flesh of serpents or earthworms, sense always the distant crawling reaching and coiling of that life that ruled her. Into sleep she passed without a great difference, for in her dreams the same wriggling shivers ran intermittently over her body, and her hands slid Narcissus-like across her body and down her thighs, caressing the smoothness in her sleep.

CHAPTER IV

Bride of the rock-hall . . . Sink adown, O Giant-wife! — THE EDDAS.

ABOVE, midway between the Abyss of the Black Cross and the caverns of the upper people, still lay the slim youthful body of Clan Harn, one gashed arm flung across the back of the fallen Morro.

Down the trail from above the stealthy steps of a party came, almost imperceptible, and Morro stirred, his instincts sending through his unconscious body an electric warning of fear that shocked him into painful awakening. Groaning as he sat up, he looked around him, his sapped head throbbing with great black pulses of pain. Wearily he sank back, let come what would, he could not move a limb for weakness.

So it was that the friends of Clan Harn, the party sent after him and Rouge into the Abyss itself, came upon the two men still lying where they had fallen. They gathered around, one stooping to peer into the faces of the wounded men.

"It is Clan! The other is, I think, one of the Brotherhood. Clan must have given as good as he got from him."

"Put a knife into him now, before worse comes of him," counseled an aged, cynical voice. "Never any good came of letting a black brother live longer than the time needed to kill him."

"We need what he can tell us of the warrens below. He might direct us to the very place Rouge has been taken for an easy death."

Morro, who had closed his eyes from weakness, opened them with an effort, managed to get his voice working loud enough to be heard. "No need to promise me anything, I can tell you where she is now. You will find her in the chambers of Vana, but not for long. She will be taken to the Worm, and the rites of her death will be celebrated within hours. It is the main purpose of the Brotherhood, serving the Worm, and Rouge is a morsel he will not forego for long."

"What are these rites, accursed one? Long have I asked, never have I learned fully what they are."

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"Few could tell you but myself, who have looked into the Worm's mind when he was otherwise engaged. During the rites, a human is absorbed suddenly into the multi-body of the Worm. The human life becomes suddenly, by a mauling mass-impregnation, infected so full of the weird life that is in the Abyss that within hot, sudden, terrible hours of horror and unbearable sporing, the body becomes another thing, one more thing to fear for men."

"Why do the Brotherhood seek this fate, stranger?"

"We do not seek it, our eyes are blinded to it by lies. We meet the same fate as the sacrifice, but slowly, over a long period, so that we adjust to the change mentally and accept it as natural. When it happens suddenly, in a mass orgy of impregnation, as will happen to Rouge, the spirit sinks into revolting growth of a beastlike kind without preparation. It will be for her a witch's worst curse, her clear beauty suddenly growing before her own eyes into a bloated creature of Hell. For Rouge it is horror beyond horror. For Vana it would be justice."

THE party, a score in number, crowded about the reclining Morro curiously, wondering why this enemy talked to them openly of these hidden secrets of the Brotherhood. They were disguised themselves in the black cloaks and about their necks hung the stone crosses, small elaborate carvings of the Worm and the Cross, but Morro knew their disguise would serve them not at all. Their faces were too pink and natural, their eyes too unshadowed and clear, their mouths clean and unsullied by the habits of the Brotherhood, who lived upon wine and lechery and murder. No Brother he knew could accept these as sinners. What did they know of sin? Morro knew now why the Hearts were in the beaten minority—they lacked an understanding, someway, of what they faced. These were men, untouched by the serpents' blood, and they did not know the real difference between the men of the Abyss and natural men. Upon some of their faces were painted slight mottlings, simulating the appearance of many of the Brotherhood, but Morro knew their eyes gave them away.

These Hearts knew, too, that none of their number had ever entered the Abyss and returned successful, though some had managed to return unsuccessful, by dint of keeping wholly out of sight. So it was they knew only what had been tortured from captured spies, such as Mornon. And Mornon himself was a dupe who did not know the inner great secret of the Worm's nature. The Worm guarded that carefully, for few would enter his service knowing fully what awaited them. The Worm knew that when they learned finally it would it would be too late. But Morro had peered into his thoughts as he dallied with Vana, and had carried off the serpent's wisdom before his spirit had died wholly within him.

"We have but hours to save her from Vana. Kill me and you will never rescue her," Morro urged, as the tall white-haired leader drew a knife and stooped above him."

"How can we trust you?" the leader asked scornfully, drawing back his arm.

"Ask the young sprig, there; I saved his life in combat with four of my own kind, bearing Rouge downward. Wake him, and ask him!"

The leader bent over Clan Harn, and poured grog down his mouth from a flask.

"Who is this tall liar who lies wounded beside you," he asked, as the boy gasped and pushed the flask away.

"Is a friend, that one," moaned Clan,

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seeing the knife in his leader's hand. "Kill him not. He is one who saw Rouge as we see her, and fought for her as we fight. He is in love with her . . ."

"That explains much," the chill lessened in the old man's voice. "We will let you live just so long as you show faith with us."

"Look here," Morro sat up, strength coming back, and rolled back his sleeves. There on his forearm over the veins were two round little holes, and around the holes the skin was white and bloated and oily—like the belly of a toad. "That was my reward for serving the Brotherhood, the Blood of the Worm. I knew not till too late what it meant, then Vana explained. I will become what the Worm himself has become. He was once a man, even as you. Even as I," Morro's voice trailed off in a brooding whisper.

"So you no longer worship the evil of the Abyss?"

"I never did; I accepted the way of life in which I was brought up. But this, this I did not expect. This worm turns, when struck. I will bite back . . ."

"Guide us!" The old Heart leader decided suddenly. "We have no chance of success, we are shamed into this by the boy here. We have never managed to raid the Abyss with success. Only by the help of such as you can we manage it. Lead us!"

Morro struggled to his feet, groaning, leaning on the old man for support. His head was bursting, and his wounds began to bleed as he moved. But he shook himself erect and started off down the dark tunnel into the depths. Behind him trailed the Heart men, single file, and at the end came Clan Harn, leaning on another for support.

THE big double metal doors, curiously worked with the monstrous figure of the Worm intertwined, the fine horny growths spiralling over the outer parts of the door in many twistings—opened slowly to the hand of Morro. Silent, slow, he slid the key of Vana's giving back into his pocket, slid his feet noiselessly forward, sidled into the darken chamber. Silently the door closed behind him, in the faces of the waiting Hearts. Like a shadow Morro moved through the shadows, stood over Vana's naked figure sprawled across her couch, the gold-barred gown trailing where she had cast it. Faint the light, and Morro stood till his eyes made clear all the outlines, marked the faint reptilian shuddering running through all Vana's soft lovely body. He knew it meant she slept with her mind in the distant company of the Worm's thinking, and he waited, still as rock, till the faint writhing ceasing, and the body of Vana lay still before him, the long curve of neck and perfect chin and delicate nostril and deep shadowed eye like a black flower on perfect stem of white outline.

His knife he held then to the soft perfect throat, his hand he laid across the drooping, heavy red lips. Startled as they shaped into a kiss upon his palm, his reflex nearly ripped the knife across the smooth neck. Vana reached up and pushed the hand away from her mouth an inch, saying softly: "You return to me like a thief. I gave you my key to use openly, not in this way. Of what are you afraid?"

Morro's thoughts whirled, his whole intent and decision dissolving like a sugar in the hot flood of his sudden desire for Vana, his whole former nature rising up and saying in his mind: What are you doing, Morro, to turn thus upon all the fabric of success you have been building for so many years of risky labors? Why do you turn on this woman who has befriended you, and whom

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your whole body and heart and mind desire as a dying man desires life? What is this knife doing in your hand? What has come over you?"

Morro said: "Strange things have happened! I have been captured by some Heart-men, sent here to rescue Rouge, and for my life I bargained to aid them in returning Rouge out of the grasp of the Worm. I know you have her here, for the time is not yet for the sacrifice. Give her to me, and I will live. Give her to the Worm, and I die."

"Since when has Morro feared the hatred of the Hearts? You have killed and looted rich homes above the abyss, have slain Hearts—why should you fear them? Go and bar the door, let them wait or flee, I will send for my killers to take them in the back if they stay . . ."

"It is not so simple, my Vana. Since the blood has been put into my veins, I know what is in store for us, and I like it not. I have sworn to get the girl for them, give her to me, or die."

Morro pressed a little on the knife, so that a gleaming thread of fresh blood ran down her white throat, and she writhed suddenly away from him, so that he reached with the other hand and grasped her by the hair, holding the curling mass of darkness, cascading perfume over his forearm and in his face, and again brought the knife blade against the throbbing whiteness.

"*You* would kill *me,* Morro?"

"Not really, Vana, for you will tell me where the girl lies, and the Hearts will take her and I go. I remain to love you and to consider what we can do to make life something to desire."

"The Master knows she is here and awaits the sacrifice, there is no escape! If we bring not the girl . . . he will take me or many, both of us, or all who are present. You know his anger by hearsay."

"TELL me, Vana, I do not want to kill you!" Again Morro pressed the blade, sliding it a little around the white, so that a ring of blood appeared under his hand. Vana gasped and fear came and raved in her eyes as she writhed her body and beat with her hands upon Morro's broad chest. Suddenly she sank her teeth in Morro's knife hand, but he pulled it free, and gradually the thrashing white naked limbs ceased, her eyes stared into his with a flickering desperate snake-like look, the big soft lips snarled back over the perfect teeth, and she lay still, gasping.

The big doors of the chamber opened behind Morro now, and the light streamed in upon Morro spread upon the wide bed beside the naked, wide-eyed woman, her body taut and shaking with fear now.

Clan Harn slid forward ahead of the others, and stooped over the two, hissing—"Did she tell? Can you get the place from her? Do not slay her without learning!"

Vana strained back to give her throat play for speech, said: "Do you swear, you Hearts, to give me life if I do speak?"

"We swear, woman of Evil, because we must, and not because we are pleased that you should live!" The gray leader was speaking truth, and his hand grasped a little white-stone Heart, symbol of truth, so that Vana's eyes saw it in his hand.

Vana smiled. "She is in the next room, bound upon the floor, the key is in the door where I left it. If you had looked, you could have taken her without all this fuss."

Clan whirled and was at the door in a flash, the Hearts after him. But Morro remained with his knife by Vana, a queer smile on his lips, thinking of anything and everything, and making sure

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she did not summon men to wipe them out.

From the room the Heartmen entered came to Morro only a strange silence. That silence he could not figure: Then back to his side came Clan Harn, his face empty, his hands listless at his sides.

"She's gone. The rope that was about her is on the floor. She has been there, someone has taken her."

Vana sat erect within the circle of Morro's arms, tense as steel with shock. This meant her death! "She can't be gone, who could have . . ."

"I know who took her." Morro's voice was weary, a sick calm had come over him.

MORNON had watched the Hearts enter Vana's chambers, hiding himself with care behind the stalactites of the unused passage. The cunning of his nature drove him to listen, but he knew before the weary Morro where Rouge lay. Knew it by sound of her silent struggle, and by his own knowledge of where she would be most like to wait. To let himself in by the same door To let himself in by the same door which had admitted Vana's hireling, to cut her ropes and lead her silently out was a deed he would never have attempted except for his fixed long determination to have her—to let nothing stop him. Marveling at his own foolhardy act, he led her away down the passage that lay unused among the many openings along that corridor.

Even as Clan swung open the door from Vana's bed chamber, Mornon had closed the outer door and left the pick-lock hanging in his haste. That pick-lock, perhaps alone, kept back the anger of the Hearts from Vana—and Morro had no strength to will her death. She had sworn to reveal the girl, and they had promised life, it was not just to slay her if the girl had been stolen. And the pick-lock hanging, with the many little steel blades dangling, made it plain it was not Vana's doing.

So they trussed her, and left her lying cursing them upon her silken coverlets, and filed away, Morro leading them to safe hiding. Knowing it was asking for discovery and death to leave her there alive, they yet did so. And Morro knew again why the Hearts were the pursued and the few, and why the evil Brotherhood were dominant.

Morro puzzled, as they stole down the least-used passages toward where he surmised Moron would take the girl, as to how Mornon had learned so soon where the girl lay? But the question was resolved for him as he noted the watching slave, high among the concretions of the wall. Mornon had posted Vana's chambers, perhaps days before, to make sure nothing passed unobserved of him.

There was no point in speaking of the thing, it was of no import to anyone but himself. So they passed the slave's eye and went along the paths Morro selected today . . .

Morro knew helpless defeat as he saw the forces of the Brotherhood closing in. He knew that all the while they had been in Vana's chambers her mind had been communing with the Worm, and that to tell him was to tell all the mass of monstrous life in the abyss, and thus in turn the Brotherhood who served them.

HE HAD known all the while they stole nearer Vana's stronghold that if they missed the first cast there would be no more chances. That was why he had not bothered insisting on Vana's death, why nothing had mattered when he learned that Rouge was gone. He knew that unless they fled at once from the abyss, there would be

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only death for them all. Still, while the girl lived, he knew he could not call off these Hearts, and did not try. It was fatalistic acceptance of unavoidable defeat that he saw the corridor they traveled suddenly blocked by the black figures of armed men, did not even turn his head to note the others at their rear. He was beaten, he had revolted, and fate had trapped his first effort for that new pale beautiful thing he called "good."

So it was that Morro stood again before the Worm, but under different conditions. Then he had been ignored as Vana's novice, given the blood without his leave as one too low in the scale to have an opinion. Now he stood before the Worm as an enemy, caught with the Hearts, and Morro lied manfully to save his life, though why it mattered any more he could not have said. Hate alone, hate of the growth of the Worms over men, gave him will to live. To be condemned meant that he would become in one mad orgy the thing that otherwise he would become in slow degrees during his lifetime. To be released would mean there was yet a chance to strike a blow that would hurt this thing the Brotherhood worshipped.

THE face of the Worm rose before the helpless men, vast, unutterably scornful of them and of all like them, proud, Luciferean, and to Morro completely imbecilic in it's lack of understanding of true life-values. About the vast toad-belly, white brows had been placed a circlet of gem-set grey metal, the beauty of the workmanship making grotesque all the whole scene of the beastly mass of life behind the Face of the Worm. Peering around the head of the Worm were the distorted once-human faces of his horde of changeling monsters, their bodies intermingled in a rank unthinking oneness of contact, their eyes looking out with a repetition of curiosity and greed for the coming orgy, their grotesque faces matching the vast hideous mask of the worm in their strange reptilian metamorphoses from the original pattern of Man. The points of the gemmed circlet upon the head of the Worm pointed outward, like the points of a halo, and as he swung his view, the great head twisted and the points dipped, and as the points dipped and rose, so dipped and rose the heads of the whole mimicking repetitive crew. Sickening, imbecilic, impossible that this less-than-human form of life should yet live longer and should have power over man. Yet it was so, and Morro stood there before him with the courageous invaders from above, waiting for the judgment of this vast inhuman mass of lusting, heedless life.

"Speak, you helpless fools who thought to thwart the minions of the Abyss. Speak, and defend your right to life, or you shall find life suddenly become another thing within you!"

The vast voice of the Master came startling clear to Morro, who had not heard the thought-voice of the Worm used before communication, had only heard his weird oral talk with Vana, and watched his thought flows unnoticed.

Clan Harn, young and foolish enough to hope, stepped forward, facing the terrible hideousness of the King of the Abyss with a trembling in his limbs but none in his voice, which rose clear and boyish in a strained treble of mingled pleading and defiance.

"We came here merely to rescue one of our maidens from an abductor. As such, we are not trespassers nor invaders, and none of the rules of warfare apply. Our errand was mercy to a young girl, and your judgment should bear in mind we meant harm to one one who had not harmed us."

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The rest of the Hearts seemed to think this was enough, and only nodded their heads to show Clan had stated their defence fully enough, for all the good it would do. They were apathetic and resigned to death.

"You, Morro, sturdy Brother of the Cross, how come you to be taken in company with these Hearts?" The Worm's voice was velvet thought, smooth and pleasant to the ears, as he addressed Morro. Morro considered it a good omen and took up his defense with vigor.

"These Heart men captured me when I lay unconscious after a fight with a robber. They forced me to guide them in search for the maiden they seek. I I was nothing loath, for it was the same man who had struck me from behind."

"And who was that man?"

"Mornon, a man from above the abyss. He stole the girl from the Heart-men for himself, and not for the revels of the brotherhood, but for his private pleasure. Since it was a private theft, no one balked but Mornon the double-spy, I saw no wrong in helping the Heart men."

THE vast head of the Worm nodded left and right, and all the crew behind him nodded left and right, mimicking unconsciously his thought with their own. Inside Morro the same swaying was felt like ripples of force so that he unconsciously swayed left and right, and the Hearts noted it, and drew away from him. Was it that that saved him, or was it that just then Vana stepped out of the great dark-way door from the side passage, walking with her own peacock undulation straight to the Head and caressing his lips with her hands.

"This Morro was truly forced to accompany the invading warriors. Give him to me, and I will make his punishment fit his crime."

Morro was again startled that Vana should speak for him, and his eyes, dazzled by the glitter of the little golden sequins everywhere upon her, filled with the sight of her flesh and her beauty and the promise that her body gave every male eye, followed her every gesture as she explained to the Worm in his own guttural forgotten tongue just what in her opinion had occurred.

Morro noted that when Vana spoke to the Worm in oral speech no one could tell from his thought of what they spoke, and none who spoke not the tongue could then tell what they were discussing. But that while they spoke thus the other thoughts of the Worm not couched in words, became clear to a listener. That the two thought flows were then as divergent as a man's day-dreams while he delivered a prepared speech.

Morro could not take his eyes off the figure of Vana, all golden shimmer and vibrant white flesh, the strength of the Worm-power flowing through her, the hideous form and lubberly malignant face and far reaching coils of the Worm's body stretching out of sight and all silhouetting with dark, utter obese turgidity the slender glowing lines of Vana's lovely body. The contrast made her beauty infinitely more devastating, and Morro wondered what this woman might have become if she had not fallen under the incrassate hand of the Worm.

MORRO'S eyes roved on across the myraid openings of the warrens beyond where the monsters bedded, and back to the surrounding dark-robed glittering-eyed assembled Brotherhood, all waiting wet-lipped for the coming rites of the transfiguration. That this transfiguration was at once a punishment and a reward, depending on how

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it was administered, was a puzzle to which he knew most of the answers. He knew that to a mind not accustomed to experiencing depravity and the delights of sin, this change was revolting, while to a mind prepared by years of custom it was but a life-change of a natural kind. That these Brothers discussed this change among themselves, laughing that virtue and innocense should make of the victim a sufferer by self causation, he did not know well, not having been initiate into the inner councils until Vana had taken him up. He would have seen through their self-delusion of superiority in desiring something the virtuous and inexperienced considered horrible, and have understood that they had lost already the inner fibre of self which makes a man individual, rather than beast, or ant-like slave.

He dreaded what was to come, hoping almost that he himself would not have to witness what was to occur, by reason of being first to be taken. But this was not to be. The first Heart was condemned by a wave of Vana's hand, from where she stood talking into the huge ear of the Worm, and the head nodded as the man was led toward the center of the fane. He was left, standing there unbound and apparently free, to await a fate he could not know. Morro was consumed with a morbid curiosity as to the details of the profane unction and regeneration.

Now over the whole assembly, filling the vast chamber of the fane, spread a vibrant penetrating intoxication, a bawdy, obscene-pictured invitation to infernal bacchanalia. Mentally penetrating, the stuff seemed a misty kind of flow of scent or miasma given off by both the mind and the body of the whole vast mass of life-redundance slow-rolling, coiling ponderously, striding and sliding forward; while the multi-mind of the monsters created a compulsion of voluptuous abandonment to carnality. Ahead of them moved the vast rotund female obesity of the Mother of Monsters, a figure known everywhere by legend, but seldom seen. She picked up the figure of the lone Heart, he seemed unable to run or move, and she did a thing to him that made the hardened Morro retch. The screaming, undulating still-living victim was then passed on to the next, and the mass-mind of them made the whole scene seem infinitely satisfying to some basic hunger. Morro's eyes watched the man's figure as it went through each pair of monstrous pad-hands, and waited for the ultimate change to show what he would become. For each of them was putting into the victim some strange body secretion, which caused the screaming body to swell and distort and swell with some fecund, devouring insemination of cell-matter, and within short minutes he was no longer recognizable as human. Back and back along the mass of strangely distorted gigantic human and serpentine crew of hybrid monstrous compromise of the flesh-pattern of man with some alien thing the victim passed, and in the end Morro saw he was indistinguishable or totally absorbed by them.

ONE by one the other Heart men followed, and Morro, casting an eye upon Vana's ecstatic writhing enjoyment of the vicious Saturnalia, saw again as he had seen before through the mind of the vast Worm himself, who in turn was slow-rolling his coils in pleasure as he watched, and with his vast power of mind, augmenting into vision the mental torments of the living growth-galvanized minds of the victims. As young Clan Harn was taken up, he saw the terrible shock of outraged humanity within him, the weird repellence

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of alien growth-spores sweeping through all his body, the fighting ego of the man going down to defeat before a change so opposed to his nature as to mean vastly more than death. This sudden subjugation of the natural virtue of the man to an intense ravishment by something so Evil in its appearance and in its effect upon his own body as it swiftly changed his own nature and self into another and opposite thing; a thing enamoured of rabid, fiery lusting, a vigorous, thumping "monstrous horrendum deforme"—a ponderous rut of bestiality . . . Watching the gorgeous inner nature of youth and youth's desire suddenly transmuted by surging fearful steps into a vast appetite of distorted degeneration, a mis-shapen unending soul taking the place of ego

He pressed the knife a little deeper into Vana's lovely throat

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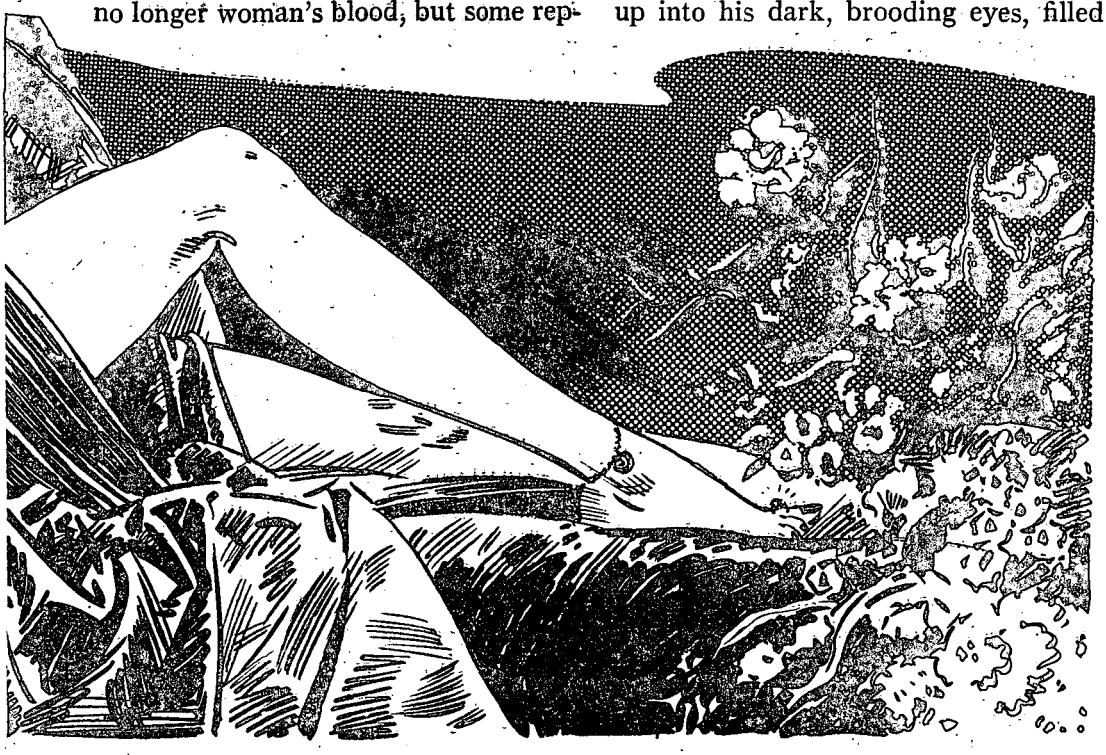
within him—this orgy of unnatural transmutation of beauty into something so fearfully powerful, yet so vastly much less than life-beauty, less than the fruition of man-life—all this taking place again and again while the weird projectional vibrating miasma of monstrous imagery of pleasure that was yet a contradiction of all human elegance and splendour—was the opposite pole of reptilian lust made manifest in curiously ornate mental projections of carnality indescribable, and to a natural man, devastatingly revolting to the extent of infinite pain.

Morro understood now why this revolting licentiousness of the monsters was a fearful punishment. And watching Vana's ecstasy as she partook of the intense vibrant field of thought generated by the whole mass-mind in the great room of the Worm's fane, Morro knew that what lived within her skull, —was not human! Morro knew that the fluid pulsing within her veins was no longer woman's blood, but some reptilian ichor of impossible blend of human-female with reptile-female.

AT LAST, at fearful long last, it was all over, and Morro breathed again, not so much in relief at his own escape, but that the girl Rouge, with her finely tuned sensitive mind and perfect body had not been brought to be cast as one more faggot on this blaze of Sin's ugliest fires.

The coiling many-bodied mass of hybrid monstrous life retracted again into it's many-chambered bed behind the great stone parapet where the Worm himself coiled and held his court, and the mist of fantastically exciting carnal-pictured thought-penetrating vibrant exudation died slowly away, as some unearthly marsh-mist dies before the fresh morning breeze.

Vana paced slowly beside the exhausted Morro, not yet rested from his exertions and injuries of the preceding hours, paced and undulated and looked up into his dark, brooding eyes, filled



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now with a loathing for all life, including his own.

The touch of her hip against his own still roused a flicker of the same witch-fire within him, but knowing what it was truly made his whole soul to sicken in realization of the corruption of his life and of all in the Abyss. The glitter of her bright serpent eyes excited him, but knowing the glitter was truly a reptilian deadly infection, Morro found within him a will to hate Vana and the understanding her influence had brought to him. But for her work he would still have considered his life as worth living and enjoying. Her voice seemed to come from afar::

"Are you fearful of having saved you from the wrath of the Worm, you have but to expect some subtle revenge of much worse kind from me?" asked Vana, putting all the husky saccharine of desire into her voice, and sliding her palm along Morro's arm where the torn black sleeve left the dark-mossed muscles bare.

"I am weary, Vana. Weary and disillusioned to learn that all the power and majesty and wisdom of the Worm, the Master whom I have served from afar for so long, is but a monstrous parasite upon man-life, and no glorious alien God come to make life interesting at all."

"You must not speak such words! Morro, I have love for you, but I cannot protect you if such words are repeated." Vana seemed truly alarmed for his safety, and Morro wondered if there really was still a woman existant within this Worm's foul tool of a body, or if this was but some part of the Master's next gambit in the game, some subtle disarming move of effect upon him, to use him toward some end Morro could not yet see.

"You love me, hah! Is that irony, or jest, or just the foul face of unreasonable truth speaking?"

" 'Tis truth, unreasonable as you may take it to be. In spite of the amorous maneuvers of prostration to the strength and male-ness of the Master which I go through for the sake of the power it brings—I am still a human, and will remain so for long years yet. Long years of youth and beauty, Morro, which I can give to you! You must understand that appearances are not always truth! Why should you, Morro, the assassin and worse that you have been, be squeamish as to how you receive the good things of life, so be that you receive them? Such things cannot be bought without a price."

"I, too, have a price, Vana. If what you say is true, I can be bought."

". . . and the price, my Morro?"

"THAT you aid me to set free this young innocent from above the Abyss, this, Rouge of the Hearts. Mornon has her, I hate Mornon, and I have set myself to free the girl. It is a peculiarity of mine that what I set hand to, I do not lay aside unfinished."

Vana paused, the blood rushed to her face in sudden rage, making of her beauty a quick mask of fury and hate. "You have fallen for that young fool's sweet face, and seek to cajole me into helping you flee with her! Nay, Morro, not this one will be your dupe. If I say it, you will be taken again, and this time not escape. You are mine, and I'll not raise a hand to save that fool child from all the fires of Hades."

Morro did not answer, walking wearily along beside her. He did not care greatly about anything. He had that apathy peculiar to old men and sinners, wherein all values are negative, and only the young are happy to see, or worth striving for. He could give Rouge back a clean life if he could free her, otherwise he saw little in life worth

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worrying about. There was no great prize to win, no goal worth striving for, nor bright promise in his future, no nothing but this sleek Hell-cat beside him, and the gradual change of his own body into the filthy sprawling unit of that mass of corruption behind the Face of the Worm. And how Vana could look forward to anything of the kind with placid acceptance as natural, inevitable and even desirable because it was not death . . .

"Because I do not have your ideals and concepts of life as anything glorious or wonderful or even different!"

"You have been listening to my thought. I had forgotten that you could, that all of the ancient blood can. So you, too, come of the blood of Ran the Hearer. I had thought you acquired all your powers from the gifts of the Worm."

"No, I think that he feared me because of that, even as he feared you and wanted you when he learned what you were. He seeks to keep all with the ancient gifts in his special watch, he does not care for enemies who can know his mind unknown to himself."

"So we are both victims of the Worm, rather than favored servants?"

"Morro, you will *have* to revise all your thinking! Things that you have always seen as such-and-such are not rightly that way. Your mind, truth, reality, men and their needs and desires, your own needs and desires and appetites, are things that can be seen in many ways. Why should you think more of a man's life than an insects? Why should should even stamping out the whole human race be more important to you than stepping upon an ant's nest? Why worry, Morro? Take the cash of pleasure; let the credit, the idealistic striving after impossible goals of good life for men, the rewards by some impossible Fate above us—let the credit go! It is a lie!"

"Vana, I had not known you gave serious thought to such problems. I had considered that I alone of all men here in the sink of the Brotherhood, gave any time to thought upon such deep subjects."

"I HAVE thought long, I have had my moments of regrets for the evil I do, and I have decided that it is truly of no more moment than the life of a midge fly whether this man or that survives, whether this Rouge is given to the orgy of the Rites, or some other less innocent and kindly person."

"How can one who speaks so, still have passion, have hate of the beauty of Rouge, have envy and petty spite? . . . Why did you send to have her brought to you, if it is not important to you whether Rouge survives or not?"

"I tell you, Morro, I am not reciting philosophic phrases from memory as you think. I have truly thought these thoughts, and I *do* still have passion and hate. Of all the things I enjoy in life, one of the greatest joys is being spoken of and looked at as the most beautiful woman of all the caverns. Since the young Rouge has come into her full bloom, she is spoken of instead of Vana. I cannot abide to lose the things I enjoy, not any least loss will I stand for, who have paid in full for every pleasure with my very blood and my body to the Worm. She must die, and to you it must be unimportant, but to me, my vanity is my pleasure to indulge, and she balks me of that. Since it does not matter truly whether there is one more or one less human on earth, or any at all . . . why should I worry about her, if it pleases me to kill her?"

"Because I ask you to forget your envy, and promise you my service and obedience. You seem to place a value on me, to have me willingly you must

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do this for me. Taken by your own words it does not matter. Therefore for one bagatelle, receive another—myself."

Vana laughed, silvery, tinkling, weirdly empty sound, inhuman yet lovely.

"Very well, Morro. I accept your offer. You have my leave to kill Mornon, and conduct the sweet pure maid to her home. Then return, or *I will find a way to bring you* that you will not relish. Return, and find your service pleasant, if not productive of any good for anything alive."

Morro bent and kissed her, for they had reached the great metal doors of her chambers, and for a moment he watched her wonderingly as she pulled the release knob, and swayed there for a moment, breath-taking in her grace and vivid life, yet somehow pitiful to that thing in Morro that had been so lately born.

What that thing was, what it might be that had revolted against all he had formerly thought fixed and immutable, Morro could not analyze. Whether hatred and anger at the vile thing that had seized him through his own blood, or whether the magic of potent lightning that dwelt in the whiteness of Rouge had bemused his normal sanity into a madnes that he mistook for sober judgment, he could not say. For Morro did not know that a race has it's hidden ties, between each man and each woman, strong motivating strings that control his comings and his goings, and that through sight of Rouge the Mother of Man had thrown about his soul a golden lasso of compulsion that all of Sin's bright lure could not dissolve, that all the weird mental tampering of the Worm's vast life-force could not untie the ancient knot of that rope. Morro could not know clearly that he was a tool of the race of man, working for the fecund clean motherhood latent in the body of Rouge, against the alien corroding spawning of the horde in the Abyss.

SUMMING up these strange influences so suddenly moving him about in spite of his own reason to the contrary—Morro thought upon the ants of the ant-hill, and likened himself to a man-ant working for the Queen, and that Queen the mother of Rouge, the future Queen. And so translating his confused thought into possible simple images, he understood why he sought. Mornon with death in his heart.

So considering, Morro lifted the little knob that Vana had just lifted, and went in to her, for burning in his mind was the shimmering slender grace and the animal lure of her, and somehow what she said about man and his pursuit of the impossible deadened the control of the golden lasso of light that his own race sought to move him through. She turned from where she postured before her mirror, the golden sequins in a tiny pile on the floor at her feet, and slid her hands slowly down the long sweet-curving lines of her body, and shivered delicately toward him, her mouth a questioning *oh* of surprise and delight that he should enter now after deciding to continue with his quest for the girl Rouge.

"Did you change your mind, Morro?"

"I am too weary, perhaps, or needed to know better you would not do something to thwart me, or could not resist knowing you waited here for me—who knows why a man does what he does. The girl can wait, I guess."

"You could never find her, anyway. Mornon is not such a fool as to hide her where she could be taken away by any man's hand."

"That may be. Perhaps I entered to you to learn where she might be looked

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for." Morro sat in the wide armed leather chair, watching the slave girls wash the white lovely body of Vana, watching them rub her with scented oil, and curl again the hair that had become disarranged—and leave her there before him, nude and scented and curled and smilingly standing there regarding him.

Weariness swept over him then, and his head nodded. Nodded down on his breast and stayed there, and his breath began to come in the deep sound of heavy sleep. Vana stamped her foot in vexation, but after a moment called her girls again, and they stripped off his torn and soiled clothing and walked him, still sleeping on his feet, toward the wide soft silken bed of Vana, and stretched him out upon it, sound asleep. And Vana slid her sensuously shivering body in beside him and caressed his sleeping form with soft slow fingers, and presently fell asleep beside him.

CHAPTER V

Such wealth of gold, old work of giants,
. . . now the Worm lies low,
gaze on that hoard 'neath the hoary rock,
stare at the structure of giants,
arching stone and steadfast column
uphold forever that hall in earth.
Beowulf (xxxvlll)

THERE was rage among the White Hearts and desperation. The loss of their proud young Rouge, the loss of their best men in the failure to rescue her, caused the Hearts to gather together and decide upon a desperate move long planned and prepared for, but put off through possible danger to all their people and to themselves. Now their desperation made them see that this risk was nothing to the risk of letting the Worm and his mutant crew absorb all the natural life of the caverns into his evil growth, and certain men from the Hearts took great casks of powder and fuses, and went up and up toward the surface. There, where the rock walls of the caverns were always wet with the water from a river overhead, the casks were placed, one after another in a long row, and the rock was cunningly examined overhead so that the powder was placed where the roof was already weakened. The fuses were lit and the Hearts went back to their city on the rim of the Abyss to wait—for what they knew might slay them all as well as the monstrous life below them.

The explosion echoed through all the tunnels with that peculiar deafening repetitive reverberation which is known only to underworld men—and deafened and frightened the people of the city ran out of their burrows and their holes in the wall, out of their wooden shacks and shops, out of their sweat-shops and slave factories, and stood staring toward the vast roof above that was a thing seldom looked at, for it never changed.

Down, down upon them poured the great river of silvery, gleaming water, splashed and churned upon the lip of abyss, and leaped over into the misty vastness below with a sound like thunder, with a roar and a churn and shrill hissing; *fell, boiling* and *streaming wide* in the still cavern air—down and down and out of sight below in the mists.

The Hearts then set guards about the tunnel that reached down into the abyss, and went home and waited, with their weapons ready. If their engineers and their spies were correct, there were few openings below to carry off the waters of the river they had released to thunder down into the cauldron of the Abyss. If they were right, soon

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the Brotherhood would come clambering up that narrow way, seeking safety —and they would find steel and death only from the Hearts.

Below, the river formed a vast spreading pool about the wall where it struck and boiled and crashed and swirled, spreading outward, reaching for the tunnels and corridors and dens, flowing, spreading, rising.

Along all the many branching tunnels of the warrens of the brotherhood, along those evil streets, ran the black-clothed wearers of the Serpent's Cross; ran their women and their few monstrous children; toward the tall rock of the bast Black Cross. The Worm would know where they could go to escape the flood, the Master would save them!

Fast as they raced, the water raced, too! Morro awoke on the silken couch, turned over to see Vana lying naked beside him, turned back to see the black water spreading, swirling, burbling from under the door.

He sprang from the bed and clutched his torn clothings, pulling them on while he shouted to Vana to awaken. Not even waiting he buckled on his belt with his knife, and raced through the door into water above his ankles. Water that rose even as he watched!

On his mind was a picture of Rouge, chained as he had found her in the gardens above, somewhere in these Hell-warrens where Mornon had found a hiding place for her! Chained, and the water rising, and himself sleeping by the evil Vana! A self-loathing such as he had never known came over him, and he raced off toward where his guess placed the girl, from his knowledge of the few places he could have hidden her. Behind him he heard Vana screaming after him, and his heart tugged that way, too, and his logic told him Rouge did not even love him, while Vana had a great need of him.

BUT that strange thing that had happened to him led him on in pursuit of the shining face of virtue, leaving behind the woman who wanted him, for the sake of the woman who did not. "Virtue," logic shrieked in his mind, "is not anything but a fool's marsh-light, men pursue it but it does not exist on earth! Men dream of it, but cannot find it practical, or anything that truly can *be* in any way." But on he went, seeing only the face of the trapped girl as he imagined she was trapped, thinking only of living a life-time without sight of her . . . while his conscience told him that he could have saved her if he had tried. He could not face that!

Now as he sped around the worm-like twistings of the round burrows of rock, behind him came a splashing and a screaming, and the lithe near-naked figure of Vana splashing after him.

"You wouldn't leave me to drown, Morro? Please wait for me, I don't know where to go to escape the water!"

Morro shouted back to the woman to run, then, and keep up if she wanted to live, and did not slacken his pace. Slipping and falling, she followed, her breath a flame in her throat, her legs not able to keep up the furious pace. But she kept him in sight for a long way, falling at last on her face, unable to rise alone. There she lay, the water washing over her face and refreshing her. Her half-strangled breath coming easier, she raised herself on her elbows, struggled to her feet—and on after the echo of his feet, after the faint shrill mud streaks where his feet had touched the stone beneath the water.

In Vana's heart burned a fire that was not the witch-fire of lust, not the evil spawning cells of the Worm's reptilian blood causing erotic appetite, but the desperation of a natural woman losing her mate, who seeks to keep him,

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even in the death she believed was coming to all in the Abyss.

On and on she struggled, falling, rising to choke out the water in her lungs, struggling on into the increasing darkness and the heavier and deeper swirl of the black water—after Morro.

Morro, the woman behind him not forgotten, yet raced on toward the hidden cell where he surmised Mornon had hidden the girl—if what he had learned of the man's doings was correct.

Past him fled the men and women of the abyss, female shrieking and male cursing as they fled—where, they knew not, but higher, higher, somewhere the water could not rise!

Morro's knife was red in his hand where he had plunged it into men in his path, men gone mad with fear and berserk in their killing. Berserk himself, if he had but known, berserk to save a girl because . . . why, he was not sure, except that something she bore in her of *life* should never be snuffed out on this earth, and what the name of that *life* was he could not say.

THE passage dipped sharply, the water rose to his neck, Morro swam, his hand touching the roof in his stroke. Then the roof came down, and he swam under water, lungs bursting, for what seemed hours. Behind him Vana turned back, stood waist deep, leaning against the rough rock wall, weeping bitterly. She did not turn back to seek safety, but stood watching the water, feeling it rise coldly about her breast, paddling it with her hands, and weeping with great sobs that had too deep meaning to her for words. Gone was the magic and power of the Worm's mind pouring it's vision and it's lust through her, gone was her sensing of the strength of power, gone was her lust to vaunt over other women her beauty and her eminence. Vana stood while the water rose to her neck, weeping . . . for a man of courage who had scorned her, at the last!

His lungs afire, his hands beating feebly, Morro rose at last again to where the roof receded and left air above the water. *Here,* here was the place, his mind told him; beyond the dip of the tunnel, here was the cell's door, and if his guess was right, here was the door hiding Rouge!

His hands sought under the seething water for the lock, found it, and it gave not at all. Heavy timbers, the door; wrought iron, the lock; Morro knew that door, and cursed.

Lunged his shoulder against the rough wood, the water holding him to weakness, and his curses sounding only futile silliness in the face of death.

Lunged, and lunged again, while his flesh pounded to a pulp against the wood, his shoulder bleeding, his strength going. The latch turned . . .

Suddenly the heavy door gave, plunging him in to fall in the water, and a soft hand raised his head out of the black heavy ripples, and a soft voice:

"It is you again! I *knew* you would come! Devil you may think yourself, but your actions are whiter than any Heart!"

"There is no time, maiden who bears a greater magic than beauty, I am too late! But come, take my hand, we will try."

Even as he took her hand in his own, a corner of wood bumped against Morro's arm in the water, he reached and touched it—a rude bench of a split log from the surface, old and dry and light—floating high!

"Lie on the wood, girl. I will bind you to it, it will keep you afloat as long as there is room to float—hurry."

"I could not hear you pounding on the door, but I felt it, saw it shake . . . I released the latch. He said to open

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to no one but himself, but I knew he would come through this flood to save me. I am chained, can you get it loose? Mornon has the key . . ."

Morro twisted the leg chain about his two wrists, put all his legs and back into a pull, groaned in agony as the chain cut in—and the links snapped!

SWIFTLY he bound her to the bench, pushed it floating through the door, swam now, pushing it ahead of him, back the way he had come.

The current flowed with him, which seemed wrong, for it would flow deeper into earth, and Morro suspected, as the Hearts knew with certainty, that the flood of water the river above was pouring into the Abyss would not be borne away, but would rise and rise until . . .

Again he plunged into the deeper part, swimming hard, pushing the weighted bench ahead, lungs burning, on and on . . . and surely no man could live under water. But at last he came again to the farther side, and swam on, and now his feet touched rocks again, and he went faster—toward the suspicious safety of the great open place of the mighty Abyss, where the Black Cross reared its evil symboling high.

About him now floated bodies of dead men, of dead women, and the clutching hands of drowning, and the floor dipped and he swam, rose again and he walked.

The sound of bitter sobbing came to him from ahead, and he saw a woman, with only her face and the black flood of floating hair all around her white shoulders—shoulders faintly mottled with the Serpent's evil change.

She it was who sobbed, and stood, waiting for death. Vana!

Morro stopped before her, and reached with one big hand and raised her face, looking at her face, for weeping and Vana were two things he had thought forever apart.

Slowly her eyes cleared, and she looked at his dark, bristled face, the eyes so strange and wild yet Morro's—and she stopped her sobbing, sighing out:

"You return! With you is Rouge . . . will you leave me here, now? Is she more beautiful than I, Morro?"

"If you place your hand on my shoulder, and swim a little, we may be able to reach the open spaces yet."

Vana obeyed like a child, and resting one hand on his shoulder, paddled along as he walked with his feet on the floor.

Presently they were both swimming side by side, with one hand on the buoyant old log bench. Ahead of them Rouge stretched out along the flat side of the bench, her head near Morro's and her eyes upon Vana's dark wet head, swimming now as easily as an otter, and very like one in her sinuous motion, her sleek wet head tilted toward Morro.

"So you do not know yet which of us is your woman? And I was weeping for a battle not yet lost! A woman can be a fool! But why did you worry about the Heart wench, if you have still a thought for me?"

Morro only looked at her, a puzzled smile on his face. "I had thought there was no heart in you, Vana. And I find you weeping. Are not tears a sign of a human emotion?"

"PERHAPS I have found I am not yet monster, not yet wholly a thing inhuman—with the Worm frightened by the water's rise, perhaps he has lost his hold on me and left my natural self to guide my body? Who can say why a woman weeps? Certain it is, I do not seem to care for life now without you, Morro. I had thought to use you, I find myself wanting something quite different from the thrill of being your conqueror, your mistress, of making

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you my slave. Something has appeared in me that is not evil, and it is hard for me to understand such things, who have been so long the servant of the influence of the things that rule us. Can you understand, Morro? The rule of the Worm's mind over me has broken suddenly, I am a woman, and I love you!"

"It is too late, I think, for both of us. Vana, I understand what is in your heart well enough. But it is too late!"

Rouge turned her eyes from one face to the other, these two swimming and guiding her little raft onward through the now so low tunnel, those two were beyond her understanding, too. What but love could have brought this assassin, this slave of the Worm, this Black Brother, evil and strong above others of the Brotherhood, this thing-to-be-hated—should yet be seen to be noble and self-sacrificing, and yet it seemed it was *not* love that moved him! And this woman, who had for long been the symbol of evil wanton cruelty to her and all other Hearts—should suddenly talk like a love-sick girl! In spite of herself Rouge gave a little hysterical laugh. Vana raged:

"Laugh, you innocent, you cheap little ignorant, who knows nothing of love or life or evil either! Laugh and I'll turn you off that piece of lumber and take it for myself!"

Morro laughed too, and pushed the raft on and now before them loomed the lighter higher roof, and ahead could be heard the roar of the vast cataract pouring it's waters into the lake that the floor of the abyss had become.

Out into that flood Morro guided the frail craft, and beside him swam the woman of the abyss, and now against them bumped the great flat area of a banquet table.

The three clambered onto the wide surface and lay there, Morro and Vana panting with deep exhaustion, lying still and motionless, while Rouge pulled her knees to her chin and looked with a child's awe upon the vast leaping arc of powerful pouring like a Titan's silver hair out, out from the lip of the precipice above, roaring into the vast boil of water, their raft surging and swaying and turning swiftly around in the eddying, maddened, swirling water.

HERE and there in the boil could be seen the white face of a corpse, turning idly as it lifted in the upsurge, and turning away and sinking again like a lost soul. Or a swimmer lifting weary arms, at last to give up and sink silently down forever. Here and there were rafts of odd chairs and table and planks bound together, and on them the black ropes of the Brethren, or the vivid fabrics of their women.

FOR all of them expected death when the water raised them high enough for the people of the upper caverns to reach them—or if it did not, death from floating and waiting and drowning to ease the pain of starving.

Time wore on, and the thunder of the falling water went on, and the spume and spray caused a heavy mist to rise in the vastness of the abyss, so that one could see but a few feet. And over there in the dimness Morro saw the vast white belly of the monster-man turning, white as a toad-belly, the great arms and fingers still, the whole thing the size of a whale in the dimness. And Morro knew now that the Worm-life could not survive the water! And in that part of him that was still life surged a great thankfulness; and in that other part that was not-human but reptilian alien, was a deep hurt, a feeling of severance keen as a knife wound, and Morro was sure now, which was self and which was hated enemy

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within him.

Time wore on, the water rose and rose, and at last they sighted the rocky lip of the precipice but a few feet away, and a dozen yards overhead. The vast abyss had filled to the brim with the waters of the mighty river the Hearts had let in on them!

Now Morro shouted, and to the edge of the cliff above came men, and cursed them:

"Shouting for help, Brother? Take your Black Cross and pray to it, all will be well! We have had enough of monster and servant, stay there and drown!"

The raft drifted on, and Morro looked at the soft round body of Rouge, sunk now in weariness to a restless sleep, and his eyes ran down the flower-blushed skin of her neck and into the promise of delight that was the swell of her upper bosom, and rested on the fair flower of faint scarlet on one white round, and his breath sobbed in his throat, and the part of him that was human became alive as if it too, was cut with a knife, and Morro knew how it felt to be dead, and to see Heaven and not be let in the gates.

Morro set up a shouting again, and his throat swelled above the black moss of his chest, and his voice rang out like a deep bell aswing under water. A woman came to the lip of the Abyss and looked down, and saw the two women stretched out white and lovely and hateful to her, she cursed them and began to fling down stones upon them.

A man came to her side, to see what it was she stoned, and a look of recognition came into his eyes, and his hand seized the woman's arm about to cast another great stone so that it slipped and fell, bruising her face.

"That is our own beautiful Rouge, what man could see her face once and forget it!"

The man took the woman by the shoulder and elbow and led her away out of sight in haste. Morro sighed, for his time was near, now.

WITHIN short minutes five men came to the lip of jagged rock, and looked down, and nodded to each other, and a long rope snaked down, falling into the water beside them.

Morro made the rope fast about the shoulders of the Heart girl, Rouge, knotting it cunningly and carefully, sighing again and again as his hands touched the soft white beauty of her breast. His face was like a Demon's truly now, as he looked up at the men above, a Demon who has looked into things no mere mortal man can understand.

"Careful, you fools, take her up easily, she will be hurt against the rocks . . . Take her, and care for her if you are men enough!"

Swaying, the white long body, curved and sweet and made by a god for caresses—Rouge passed upward. Her eyes were on Morro's dark, intense face, eyes drinking in his fierce spirit, the wide planes of his strong jaws, the dark bristle of his beard, the deep-set eyes sparking with a fire greater than any other, a courage and a strength in him almost repellant to her, yet not so at all! And the mist swallowed up that face, and tears sprang out on her eye lashes and ran down the soft bloom of her cheek, bitter tears wetting her lips with a loss she would never forget.

Rouge said not a word to the men who took the rope from about her shoulders, nor smiled at their greeting, her face was stony and wet with tears as they led her away toward her home.

The men debated each with the other, and at last decided—and the rope was again cast down to the raft below.

A bellow from the mist was startling

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to their unexpecting ears:

"Fools, do you want to raise more of the Serpent's Children? Have you not had enough of the Worm? *Let not a man out of the Abyss, nor a woman! In them is the seed of the Worm,* a living seed. Take your rope, *for us is death!*"

The end of the rope came sailing at them, flung so hard it came coiling and whirling, on above their heads to snap out of their hands and fall in a long twisting snarl behind them. And it was a marvel to them that the falling rope made the great symbol of the Worm upon the rocks, falling into the sign they feared, the Evil sign of the Brotherhood!

Looking down, the fearful men saw a great dark-browed brother in the black of the Worm's servants, and in his hand was a knife. His lips were pressed to a woman's, a white body shivering sensuously all along his own, a dark flower of evil her face, the eyes closed in ecstasy. And as he kissed her, the knife sank slowly, slowly into the soft breast, and the woman did not scream, but only kept her burning lips upon his.

* * *

Such was the end of evil for the people of the caverns above the Abyss.

THE END

NAPOLEON'S ORACULUM

By J. R. MARKS

A CURIOUS book on divination was found in Napoleon's cabinet at Leipsic during the confusion that followed the defeat of the French army. He regarded it highly and consulted it prior to his most important undertakings. This book, which was at that time five hundred years old, was written in German. It contained a table which was called the oraculum, at the top of which was a column of dots similar to those found on dice, but arranged in a different manner. The way he found out what was about to happen was to ask a question and the answer, whether favorable or unfavorable, was found according to the number and position of the dots opposite the question. There was also a table of the letters of the alphabet from A to Q, the exact position of which had to be observed in looking into the future. There were also days when it was unfavorable to consult the oraculum. Bonaparte took satisfaction in consulting his book for many years, but in the end it failed to save him from the disaster of Waterloo and the disgrace of St. Helena.

* * *

ANCIENT MEDICAL MAGIC

By H. R. STANTON

ONE of the great advantages of medical magic is that it allows the cure to be performed on the doctor instead of the patient. The victim is relieved of all the trouble and inconvenience while his medical man writhes in anguish before him. The peasants of Perche, France, have the impression that vomiting is caused by the stomach coming unhooked and falling down. So a doctor is called in to put it back in place. He throws himself around in all sorts of horrible positions until he thinks his own stomach is unhooked. Then he goes through another series of contortions and wild grimaces for the purpose of hooking it up again. The patient expresses relief and pays the practitioner five francs.

A Dyak medico, when called to the bedside of a patient, will lie down and pretend to be dead. He is treated just like a corpse, wrapped up in mats and carried out of the house, and placed on the ground. In a couple of hours another doctor will unwrap him and bring him to life; and as he recovers, it is the custom for the sick man to recover also.

* * *

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The Silver Medusa

by Alexander Blade

Janice danced wildly to the mad laughter of Morton Caroll — who held the terrible secret of the Silver Medusa . . .

I DROVE all the way up the hill. It was about six hundred feet high, with wooden slopes, and the dirt road wound crazily around it. The top of the hill was flat, as though it had been sheared off with a knife. There were lots of trees on top, so many of them that the house was well concealed.

All the way up I kept talking to myself. I said: Marty, you are a pretty bright boy. This job is going to be a cinch. It will be the easiest thousand bucks you ever made.

Then I got to the top. It was also the end of the dirt road. From where I stood the view was breathtaking. I could see the Berkshires stretching in all directions. Only one trouble. The gravel road that led to the white house began on the other side of a high iron fence.

There was a gate. And hanging on a hook was a bell. I should have rung the bell, but sometimes I am not so polite. A little figuring and I had the answer.

The fence was about fifteen feet high, and each of the iron bars that composed it had a sharp looking point. I took hold of a bar in each hand and muscled myself upward, like a gymnast climbing ropes. When I got to the top I poised a second, then jumped.

The ground on the other side of the fence was hard. I landed on my feet, very flexed, and let myself roll forward onto my palms, the back of my neck, my shoulders. I finished back on my feet again.

Then I heard feet crunch on gravel. Not too far away. Three steps and I was behind a screen of bushes. When I saw the face on the man who came along the gravel path I was glad I'd got out of the way. He would have made a nice gargoyle. He was also five and a half feet high and just that wide. And he had a gun in his pocket.

The job was getting to look less like a cinch. But nobody gives away a thousand dollars for falling off a log. I had had the foresight to back up the car so it couldn't be seen from the gate, so I was pretty safe for a while.

I cut along behind the bushes and across a block wide stretch of green lawn I hadn't seen from the gate. Then I got my first view of the house. It was all white, with white columns running the length of the side I was on. Like Jefferson's home at Monticello. Or a Greek temple.

From beyond the house came feminine voices and after I got off the lawn I used the cover of some more shrub-

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It was a weird bacchanalian scene, with Janice dancing in wild abandon . . .

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bery to make my way in that direction. Only I didn't get very far.

"Stop where you are," the voice said.

I turned around, feeling like a kid who's been caught with his hand on the exit door of a theatre. Behind me was a tall man, very tan. He had gray hair and he must have been about fifty but he looked fit in the white toga he was wearing. I also noticed that his feet were sandalled.

"You Morton Caroll?" I asked quickly, figuring it wouldn't hurt to take the offensive.

"The question is, who are you?" He had a soft voice, but his gray eyes looked as though they could be pretty cruel. He didn't wait for my reply. "I assume you climbed the fence. You were fortunate. It is ordinarily charged with electricity. Only a moment ago my men fixed a break in the wiring."

The hair on the back of my neck rose. It rose some more when I saw the two characters who came walking toward us from the house. Compared to them the first guard I'd seen was a movie idol.

It would take only a minute or so for them to get to where we were standing. And after that I knew that they were going to walk me back to the gate and see that I went through it. I talked fast.

"I heard about this dancing school you've got here, Mr. Caroll. And I want to be an adagio dancer. So I thought I'd come up and see if you wouldn't take me as a student."

"I see." His smile told me he saw too well. "What are your qualifications?"

"Well, I'm pretty agile. I'm strong, too. Used to do some weight lifting, played football at college, and so forth. Also I learn quickly."

"Were I an employment counselor I should say you would make a good detective," he told me. He was very clever. Just then his men came up.

I drove all the way down the hill.

ABIGAIL CAROLL had a back like a ramrod and she wore clothes that went out of style years ago. She lived in a New England home that was as old as the Pocahontas and John Smith story. She was very rich. While I told her my story she sat as quiet as a Puritan in church.

"I asked my lawyers to get me a detective who had brains. And he sent you! If the Morrisons hadn't been our lawyers for two hundred years I'd get new ones. What school did you say you attended?"

"Illinois."

"Hmmm. I should have known."

"Listen," I said. I was getting hot under the collar. "You called me in and told me to find out what was going on up there. And nothing more. If you want me to do a good job you'll have to help me. I'm a detective, not a clairvoyant."

Her back stiffened, if it were possible for it to get any stiffer than it had been. Her angular features sharpened.

"Mr. Noon, you are a fool!"

I thanked her politely and took my hat off my lap and got up to leave. She told me to sit down. I sat down and put my hat back on my lap. But she didn't look so sure of herself.

"I assume Morton Caroll is your brother," I said.

"My husband."

That was a surprise, although I don't know why it should have been. I have seen some very unlikely women with husbands.

"We have been separated for some years," she went on. "I married Morton Caroll when I was quite young. He was a professor at the school I at-

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tended."

All along his name had seemed familiar to me. Now I had it. I remembered that in second semester Greek we had used a text written by a man named Morton Caroll. His wife was still talking.

"A divorce would have made a scandal, if you must know why I didn't get one," she said.

"And now you want one." It seemed like a good guess.

"No. I am quite content to have my attorneys . . ."

She couldn't carry it off. Her voice broke and she sat there looking like any worried middle-aged woman. I waited until she had recovered some of her composure.

"I may not have gone to Harvard," I said, "but I'm a gentleman nevertheless. Anything you tell me will be held in strictest confidence. And I am not a fool."

It turned out that behind Abigail Caroll's stony exterior there was a woman. Her story was a human one. She had not always been forty. And when she was young she had made a mistake. Many girls make the same one.

Fortunately no one found out about it. Then she met Morton Caroll and she married him. That would have been all right had she not, in a moment of confidence, told him the story. As a result, when she discovered that all scholars are not necessarily gentlemen, she found it hard to get rid of Mr. Caroll.

"He said he would shout that story to the world if I tried to divorce him," she told me.

"That's blackmail."

"I know. But his price was a yearly allowance and a separation. I could afford the allowance. And he spent the next ten years digging among Greek ruins. Two years ago he came back and bought that hill and built the house on it."

"And he wants more money. Is that it?"

"I fear he wants all my money. I think my husband is mad, and I'm afraid he wants to kill me!"

I WHISTLED softly to myself. My impression had not been that Morton Caroll was mad. He didn't look like the kind of man who'd murder anyone, either. But Abigail's sort doesn't scare easily, or without cause.

"I didn't mean literally all my money," she corrected hastily. "Still, since we've never been divorced, he'd get most of it if I died."

"Any other relatives?"

I didn't like the way it was going. She was not telling me everything. Not that I wanted to know everything. Just enough so I wouldn't walk into something I was unprepared for.

Most of my cases were industrial and financial ones. I worked, usually, for corporation lawyers like the Morrison firm. That was why I couldn't refuse when they asked me to help Abigail Caroll. I sat and watched her make up her mind to answer my question.

"One relative," she said slowly. "A niece. Her name is Janice Perry. If anything happened to me I should like her to inherit my fortune."

"But . . .?"

"But Morton has lured her to that Greek temple of his and I am certain he does not intend for her to leave there alive!"

I was so intent on what Mrs. Caroll was saying that I didn't hear the door open behind me. And, since Mrs. Caroll was examining her fingernails while she spoke, she didn't hear it either. The first we knew that anyone was in the room with us was when the girl spoke.

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"Aunt Abigail! How can you say such a thing?"

We were both startled. I swivelled around and got to my feet. I would have whistled but that wouldn't be polite. Janice Perry was a honey. She had raven hair, blue eyes, a complexion that most women have to get from a box, and about five feet of luscious curves.

"Good afternoon, dear," Abigail said calmly. "Your presence proves me temporarily wrong, for which I am glad. This is Mr. Marty Noon. My niece, Mr. Noon."

Janice gave me a smile and said howd'y'do and I bowed slightly and said howd'y'do. I stayed on my feet until she found a chair and then I sat and waited for Abigail to make the next move. She was certainly direct.

"Mr. Noon is a detective, Janice. I have engaged him to discover what that evil man is up to."

"He is not an evil man. And he is not up to anything."

She said it calmly. If it weren't my business to be observant I might have seen nothing unusual about her. A doctor would have noticed it, too. She was sitting in a good light, facing a wide window. The pupils of her eyes should have been small. They were dilated.

Dope can do that to a person's eyes. Somehow I didn't think she'd been drugged.

"Morton is a very handsome, persuasive man, my dear," Abigail said, interrupting my thoughts. "It might be possible for him to deceive an inexperienced girl like you."

JANICE didn't reply. She didn't seem to want to talk about Morton Caroll at all. The conversation lagged. Finally she asked us to excuse her. She went out by the same door through which she had entered.

"Could you be wrong about Mr. Caroll's intentions?" I asked politely.

Abigail gave me a hard, fixed look, and had another inward struggle with herself. Another revelation from her past, I thought. It didn't come. Her inhibitions were iron-clad, brass-bound, and copper-riveted.

"Do you love your niece?" I asked, trying to get a wedge in somewhere. She answered calmly, but I knew she meant every word.

"More than anything in the world. She is all I have."

"Good. Then, assuming Mr. Caroll is after your money, here is how I think he would proceed: He would dispose of your niece first. Then you would have no other heirs. Legally he would be in an excellent position to take everything."

"You are persuasive, Mr. Noon."

I didn't thank her for the compliment. Compliments are a dime a dozen. Take one into a bank and see how much you can borrow on it. But Abigail was loosening. She kneaded her hands against each other until the veins on the backs of her thin wrists stood out.

"Mr. Noon, I am not mad. What I am about to tell you may make it seem that I am. Every night for the last two weeks I have had visitations!"

My self control is very good. I didn't blink an eyelash. Abigail Caroll owned stock in some corporations which threw a good deal of money my way. She kept talking:

"I don't mean ghosts, Mr. Noon. But there has pervaded my room a strange musk odor, exciting but sickening. And there has been music! Strings plucked by invisible hands and pipes played by invisible lips."

I didn't waste time asking useless questions, like whether she might have left a radio on. Anyway, she wasn't

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finished.

"It was exactly two weeks ago that Morton completed his temple and moved into it! Then these strange manifestations began. He is trying to destroy me, and by some occult and inhuman method."

Strangely, I believed her. There wasn't anything further I could do at the moment so I made ready to leave.

"Is this house well guarded?" I asked. "We'll have to take all the physical precautions we can."

"Of course."

"Where does your niece live?"

"With me. Two days ago she left the house after lunch. Late that same afternoon she telephoned and said she had met Morton in town and was going to spend the night at his place. I couldn't dissuade her."

ACCORDING to Abigail her suspicions had been aroused when she had sent her chauffeur to see what was going on atop the hill. He had climbed it on foot, at night. And although he had not got very close, which was lucky for him, he had caught a glimpse of something. He had seen, so he said, a group of girls dancing naked on the grass!

That was the reason I had mentioned a dancing school. If the chauffeur was right, what a scandal it would make. I was thinking about that when I left the house and went down the driveway to my car. When I got to the car I found Janice Perry sitting on the front bumper.

"Mr. Noon," she said.

"Call me Marty," I told her. If she wanted to be friendly I was willing.

"Don't believe what my aunt says about Uncle Morton."

"How well do you know your uncle, Miss Perry?"

"I haven't seen him in years, but when I was a child he was very good to me. He wouldn't hurt anyone."

Her smile was appealing, and she stood very close to me. She had changed her dress to one that fit tightly. I backed off a couple of feet and kept my eyes carefully on her left ear.

"What about the other girls up on the hill?" I wanted to know.

"Girls? You must be mistaken. The only people there are Uncle Morton and his housekeeper, Katina, who came back from Greece with him."

"No music? No dancing?"

"Of course not!"

I almost believed her. But I was working for her aunt. Also, there were a few things that made me suspicious. I played up to the point carefully.

"Your aunt is only trying to protect you," I said. "You believe that, don't you?"

"Of course. But I'm over twenty-one. I can take care of myself."

"I'm sure you can." I wasn't sure at all but I said it anyway. "Nevertheless, doesn't it seem strange that your uncle should put an electrified fence around his grounds? And hire thugs to guard the place?"

"Not at all. Be brought back many valuable things from Greece. It's only natural he should want to protect them."

So far she was doing fine. If we'd been in school she'd have got a gold star, or a hundred, or whatever they give kids nowadays. All her answers rang true.

Under other circumstances I would have been ready to give up. But you don't give up people like Abigail Caroll. They have too much influence. Also, I was still positive it wasn't Abigail who was crazy.

I was taking my first step toward the door of the car when I noticed

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something. Janice had changed her dress. When she'd come in she had been wearing a blue number that just matched the color of her eyes. She had also worn a pair of matching silver bracelets and a small silver head was fastened to the lapel of her dress.

Now she wore a black rayon jersey number that clung like a second skin. Her silver bracelets had been replaced by a golden chain that made several loops around her waist. It was strange that she had not taken off the silver head. That was on this dress too.

I TOOK a good look at it and made a wry face. It was not pretty; hardly what I'd expect Janice Perry to wear. The head was about the size of a large cherry, and if it was a likeness it was the likeness of the ugliest woman I'd ever seen. But the most interesting feature was not the face. It was the hair, wrought with infinite patience from strands of silver.

Each hair on the head seemed to be a tiny silver snake! And so wonderfully was it made that each snake seemed to be alive!

Janice couldn't help noticing my interest. "My uncle gave me that."

"What is it?"

"A Gorgon."

"Do you like it?"

For the first time she showed much emotion. A fleeting shadow crossed her face and her eyes had a faraway look in them.

"I—I'm not so sure. But he said he wanted me to have it. I think he has a large one just like it."

"So he collects gorgons' heads," I smiled. "His name should be Perseus rather than Morton Caroll."

Maybe she didn't get the reference, but my words seemed to hit a chord. Her eyes got darker, and the darkness was a vague fear. I kept punching in the hope that I'd land another lucky blow in the dark.

"What other knickknacks has he brought back from Greece? A chimera? Maybe even a satyr?"

I wasn't prepared for her reaction. Her cheeks lost all their color and she seemed shaken, as though by a cold wind. Inside Janice Perry something was churning. But it stayed inside. I could see she was reaching for it. It might have been a memory, just beyond her consciousness.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Noon—Marty, I mean," she stammered. "I have to go now. Uncle Morton told me—I mean I promised him—I'd be back tonight."

For a girl who's been anxious to talk a few minutes before she changed to one who was even more anxious to get away from me. Her sudden bewilderment reminded me of some criminals I've seen. They have a prepared alibi, an answer for every question the police might ask. But sometimes the police ask different questions than they expect. And they get befuddled.

That's how it was with Janice Perry. She'd learned her lesson perfectly, and when class started it had turned out to be the wrong lesson.

I didn't try to stop her. I let her go, watching her until she'd disappeared through the old door at the front of the mansion. When enough time had elapsed I went back and rang the bell.

Fairson answered the door. He was the butler, about fifty-five and balding and with a comfortable paunch. But he was big and substantial as the old house.

"I want to see Mrs. Caroll," I said. "Right away. And after you've called her I want you to stand here. Don't let anyone out. No matter who."

He was gone only a few seconds and when he returned it was with the information that Abigail would see me

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in the library. I left him at the door.

SHE was surprised to see me back so soon. And she was more than a little worried. Unfortunately there was not much I could tell her. I was playing a hunch.

"I want you to see that your niece does not leave this house," I said. "Use force to keep her here, if necessary."

That's when I found out that Abigail Caroll trusted me. Her earlier derogatory remarks hadn't meant a thing. Instead of asking questions she just nodded.

Then I told her I wanted to talk to her chauffeur, the one she had sent to spy on her husband. She rang for Fairson and within a couple of minutes the chauffeur was in the room with us.

"Exactly what did you see the night you peeked through the fence on the hill?" I asked.

He was not a young man. He took his time about answering. He was the kind of man who was slow, steady, and sure. What he'd seen he had seen. Or so he said.

"Young ladies, sir. Completely devoid of clothing." He reddened because Abigail was there. "I didn't count them but there were at least five. They were dancing to some wild, abandoned music. I didn't stay long because I heard someone coming along the inside of the fence. But that's what I saw, sir."

I said that was all I wanted to know and Abigail said: "That will do, Summers," and he eased himself out.

"Now what?" she demanded.

"I don't know," I had to admit. "Your niece says there is nobody at the house on the hill except your husband and his housekeeper. I'm inclined to believe her. I'm also inclined to believe Summers."

In the first place that was paradoxical, and Abigail didn't like paradoxes. Secondly, she didn't care what I was inclined to believe. She wanted action. I told her she'd get it.

"I don't think you are a mercenary person, Martin," she said suddenly.

Another compliment. And she'd called me Martin. I wondered what was next. I found out. Abigail didn't pay off in compliments.

"The thousand dollars was just a retainer. If you help me I shall see that you are properly remunerated," she told me.

ABIGAIL was right. I wasn't mercenary. The money wasn't going to spur me on to greater activity. But as I drove toward my hotel I was gripped by a strange excitement. Something was in the wind; something that sent shivers up my spine. I'd been around too long not to trust my hunches.

Nevertheless I was not worried. I parked the car in the lot next to the hotel. Then I went in and crossed the lobby and entered the coffee shop. A sandwich and coffee was all I had time for.

When I'd finished I paid my check and took the elevator up to the seventh floor. By the time I'd walked the ten or twelve steps to my room I had my key in my hand. A turn of my wrist and the door was open. The shades were still drawn, just as I'd left them, and the room was dusky.

I didn't see the hand that swung down at my head as I went through the door.

A pinwheel went off inside my skull. Lights flashed, bells rang. An inch closer and there would have been only darkness. A heavy blackjack can kill a man.

Because I was moving fast as I came

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in the blow was only a glancing one. And because my reflexes are trained I kept moving, kept moving almost by sheer instinct. The next swing missed me altogether. I went all the way across the room, almost on my knees at first, but gaining strength at every step.

When I turned I could see. There was a thing in there with me that was like a gorilla, short and squat and snarling. It came at me with that deadly thong swinging from its wrist.

An untrained man would have tried to dodge back—and he would have died. I waited for the swing, and then stepped in. It curled around my neck.

My fist drove at the solar plexus. I might just as well have hit a stone wall. But my opponent was still off balance and he couldn't get set. I kicked the ankle on which he had most of his weight and felt him tip.

His own motion was added to the throw I used on him. He came up off the floor and twisted in the air. He crashed against the wall. I thought he was dead.

He wasn't. Before I could go after him he was on his feet and running. The door was still open. By the time I got to it he was down the hall and past the elevators and through the doorway to the stairs. I wasn't up to chasing him.

I went back into my room and shut and locked the door. Then I sat in a chair for a while and felt the bump that was growing on the back of my head. My stomach was upset but that went away.

Another time I would have called down to the desk. When the man with the blackjack got downstairs he would have found the hotel detective waiting for him with something more deadly than leather.

But Abigail Caroll didn't want publicity. And if this assault with intent to kill wasn't tied up with what I was working on, then my name spelled backward, forward, or sideways wasn't Noon.

There are other people than hotel detectives you can call on a hotel phone. I used the one in my room to call New York. I spoke to a man named Morrison. He was not only a lawyer; he was on the board of governors of a university. While I waited he called the university.

THEY didn't have the information he wanted so they called another university while he waited. The phone bill would be high, but in half an hour I was talking to a man who'd known Morton Caroll well. And this man had been told to cooperate. He said things which could have got him sued for libel.

The sum total of his conversation was that Morton Caroll had bats in his belfry. Which agreed with Abigail. It seemed that Caroll had not only taught Greek but had become practically immersed in it. He had been relieved of his chair at one college because he'd expressed the opinion that the ancient Greek legends were true!

"He believed the Greek gods still lived," the voice on the phone said. "And he once told me that if he ever got the money he was going to Mount Olympus to find them!"

I put down the phone, thinking that Morton Caroll had finally got his money. Abigail had given it to him. And he'd used it to finance an expedition to Greece.

He had also used it, when he returned, to build himself a temple atop a hill. He had brought back things like Gorgons' heads. What else? I didn't know, but I was glad I'd told Abigail to keep Janice at home.

Outside there was a rumble of thun-

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der. The shades were up, but twilight had come while I spoke on the telephone, and the room was gloomy. I got up to turn on the lights and the phone rang. It was Abigail Caroll.

I didn't have to hear the words she spoke. At the first sound which came over the wire I knew I was talking to a woman almost hysterical with terror. And because Abigail was the kind of woman she was that terror shot through me too.

"I'll be right over," I said, even before I knew what she wanted.

Only for one moment did I stop. That was all I needed to kick off the shoes I was wearing and put on a pair which had heavy rubber soles. Then I ran for the door, left it open behind me as I made the elevator in three jumps, and thumbed the button.

We went all the way down without stopping at any floors. That boy knew I was in a hurry. I raced across the lobby, past a startled doorman, and cut across the lot to my car.

It had taken me twenty minutes to drive from the Caroll home to the hotel. I made the return trip in ten. It had begun to rain but I didn't let that slow me down.

Lights showed from every window as I rolled up the driveway. Before the car had fully stopped I was out of it. The big oak door opened to let out a flood of yellow light.

"The library, sir," Summers gasped. It was he who had opened the door and he was pale as a ghost.

Abigail was waiting for me. Her face was set in lines that had been etched with acid. She too was pale as death. But while fear might shake her it would never break her.

"What is it?" I said. I had to wait a full minute while she gathered her strength.

"The couch." she said. That was all.

There was only one couch in the room, and that was turned so that its high back was to us. It had been facing the other way that afternoon. I hesitated and Abigail pointed her finger at the couch, but without looking in that direction.

My first thought was that something had happened to Janice. I rejected that even as I went toward the couch. If it were Janice Abigail might show grief, but not terror. I went around the end of the couch and looked down.

My second thought had been right. It was not Janice. It was Fairson. The butler was laid out on the couch, straight and white. His eyes were open and sightless. He was dead, but I bent and touched him anyway.

His body was as hard as stone!

HOW I brought myself to touch him again I don't know. But I did. I flicked my nail against his hand. The sound was the same as though I had hit a rock.

It was a man who lay on that couch. It was Fairson. I knew that. And yet it was not Fairson. It was a marble statue of Fairson!

"I don't understand," I muttered.

I knew I was sweating, a cold sweat. It was not the first time I'd seen a dead man, and some of the dead I had seen were not pretty. But none of them had turned to stone.

"We'd better get out of this room," I said.

Someone had to take command and it had to be me. I got Abigail and Summers into the hall and closed the library door.

"When did it happen?" I demanded.

Somehow I got the story out of them. It was incoherent. It didn't make sense. Things that don't make sense shouldn't be true. But this was true.

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One minute Fairson had been alive. The next minute he was dead. He had been alone in the hall. Suddenly he had cried out. Both Abigail and Summers had heard him. They heard him fall, not as a man might fall, but as a block of stone. And-that was all they knew. They had heard no one come in or go out.

"Where's Miss Perry?" I asked. Neither of them had mentioned her.

"We had quite a struggle with her," Abigail said, "but we finally got her upstairs and locked her in a room. After—after this happened to Fairson I went up to see if she was still there. She refused to answer but I heard sounds. And the door is still locked."

"I'd better look," I told her.

She handed me the key and told me which room it was. I took the stairs two at a time. The room was the second down the long hall. The door was locked, all right. I unlocked it and stepped inside. Janice Perry was gone!

It wasn't too hard to figure out. The window was locked from the inside. So she must have had a key. Her aunt just hadn't thought of that. I, however, had a good many things to think about.

It was time for the police to step in. Not to call them would endanger Janice's life. I was sure of that. But if I told Abigail that Janice was gone the consequences might be disastrous. I didn't think she could stand the shock.

I locked the door and went back downstairs, thinking fast. Abigail Caroll and Summers were waiting for me at the foot. My face, I hoped, showed nothing.

"Still there," I said. "Asleep. I'm going up to see Caroll now. You call your doctor and have him take a look at Fairson. He'll do whatever is necessary."

Without waiting for any questions I got out. I had to call the police and tell them to get to the top of that hill as fast as they could. But I couldn't call from the Caroll home. There ought to be some place near by where I could call.

RAIN fell out of a dark sky as I wheeled the car out of the driveway. There was another big home a few hundred yards away and I thought I could call from there. The home was dark.

I kept going, driving fast despite the rain which was slicking the surface of the road. Another big home loomed out of the darkness on my right but that too seemed uninhabited.

Before I knew it I was on the open road and there were no more dwellings. The country here was hilly. Maybe down one of the side paths I could have found a place to make my call. But I couldn't take the time to try.

Fairson was already dead. One wasted minute might mean another death, another stone corpse. Janice would make a lovely statue. She was still lovelier alive.

A hole in the road made the car leap and skid and I had to keep my mind on my driving. The speedometer said I was doing sixty. It wasn't fast enough but it was the best I could do with any hope of getting to the hill in one piece.

The rain had turned into a storm, with wind whipping around the car and even tilting it on curves. By the time I got to the foot of the hill I could not see twenty feet ahead.

I turned off the car lights and opened the dashboard compartment. There was no gun; I seldom need one in my work. But there was a pair of electricians' gloves and a length of wire and some rope. They were going to come in handy.

Since I couldn't drive up I had to

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climb. It was hard work, dirty work. I stuck to the winding road by feeling, thankful for having taken the time to memorize most of the turns. I fell often but that didn't matter. It wasn't going to be a formal call.

A lightning flash furnished a lucky momentary illumination. The end of the road was up ahead and I didn't want to finish in front of the gate. There'd be a guard.

I turned off and scrambled through some brush, making plenty of noise which was drowned out by the wind and the heavy rain. The fence ran in a great curve. Beyond that I could see nothing. I played it safe and kept away from the fence until I was far from the gate and at a point where the guard couldn't possibly see me.

Then I moved up close and put on my gloves after I had tied a running loop in the rope. On the fourth try I got the loop over the top of one of the iron spears and pulled it tight. Making certain that none of the wet rope touched the ground, I leaped upward and got both my feet on the one shaft. As long as I kept it that way I was safe.

Inch by inch I moved up, my body at a right angle to the electrified post. Only constant pressure kept my feet from slipping. Then at last I had one foot on the point. I got the other foot up and jumped. The ground was soft and the thud could not have been heard ten feet away.

As soon as I felt earth under me I was running. The lawn was at my left and I headed in that direction. Beyond the lawn the white temple stood like a great ghost.

I knew where the front entrance was but I couldn't try that, so I cut across the grass at a diagonal which would bring me past the side of the temple. Then I swung in again and came up at the rear.

Not a light showed. In the darkness I had to inch my way along, feeling for a door or window. There was no door, but up about as high as I could reach I found an opening. Hooking my fingers onto the narrow ledge, I muscled myself upward.

The opening was only two feet square and I had quite a job getting my shoulders through it. Then my head hit something soft and clinging. Drapes. No wonder I hadn't seen any lights.

The drapery was thick and soft and not a sound came from beyond it. What was on the other side I couldn't know. I heaved a prayer and let myself down as gently as I could.

THERE was nothing on the other side! I was in a great dark room. Very slowly I moved around the wall, knowing that sooner or later I had to come to a door. Several times my shins cracked against divans and I bit my lips to keep from groaning. As last I found the door.

It did not fit tight against the floor and I bent and put my ear to the crack at the bottom. Nothing; no light and no sound. Hoping the door was on well oiled hinges, I took the handle and pulled. And came up against another black drapery that hung in heavy folds.

But now I heard sounds. There was a high, shrill piping that made me suck in my breath. And when I did that I caught the odor of musk! My fingers ran very gently along the drapery until I found a point where two sections overlapped. I moved one aside until a tiny sliver of light showed, and glued my eye to the opening.

I was looking into a great room, all white, which must have taken up the entire center of the temple. There were no furnishings except for two

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thrones on a dais at the side. On those thrones sat Morton Caroll and a woman, each of them with a silver cup which they had just tilted to their lips.

But it was not on them that my attention centered. It was on the middle of the floor. For on that floor five girls, wearing only filmy white garments, danced in a mad whirl. One of those girls was Janice Perry. And leaping and cavorting around them was something that looked like a man, except that his feet were hoofs and there were horns on his head!

My blood froze as the satyr reached out and clawed at one of the girls. From Morton Caroll's lips pealed a mad laugh. The handsome dark woman at his side joined him. And the satyr puffed his cheeks and played his pipes and the girls whirled faster than before.

"Dance!" the man on the throne shouted. "Dance!"

I wanted to rush out and stop the obscene thing, wanted to halt the wild music that beat against my senses and churned my emotions. But I could not. I could only stand frozen as the dance quickened and the musk odor strengthened. And mingled with that was the insane laughter of the two on the thrones.

Suddenly Caroll waved his hand imperiously. The piping ceased, the satyr shrank back to the foot of the throne. The dancing girls huddled against the side wall. I wondered what was going to happen next.

It turned out that I was not the only observer of the bacchanalian scene. For Morton Caroll was pointing to a bulge in the drapery at the far side of the room.

"Out!" he shrieked. "Come out of there!"

From behind the drapery stepped his three guards, their heads hanging sheepishly but their eyes glued almost hypnotically to the girls along the wall. They moved toward the dais and stopped as Caroll held up his palm.

"I warned you," he said. "I warned you not to step into this house after dark. You have disobeyed and you shall pay the price! None but the gods may behold the rites!"

"The guy is nuts," I heard one of the men whisper. His hand slid to his hip.

I thought so too. And then I was not so sure. For all but one of the dancing girls had vanished! Only Janice was left. The satyr too had disappeared into thin air!

MORTON CAROLL reached behind his throne and brought up a large velvet sack which he held on his lap. His hand hovered at the mouth of the sack.

"You have disobeyed," he said. "And by Zeus, you shall die!"

He was going to be too late, I thought. The guard had his gun in his hand. But Caroll was not reaching for a gun. His hand had dipped into the sack and he was drawing out something large and misshapen. It was a head, a Gorgon's head just like the one Janice had worn.

But on this head the hair writhed like living serpents! Medusa!

I saw the whole thing, for I stood at the side. One of the guards had time to shriek in terror. And then all three were frozen into stone as they saw the face of Medusa. They fell, lifeless blocks of stone. A gun clanged on the hard floor.

"And now my niece," Caroll said. The head was back in its bag.

Janice moved like a sleepwalker, her eyes open and staring. She was afraid. She was in a trance.

"First you and then my loving wife," Caroll said. "And then back to

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Olympus." He laughed crazily. "Back to the gods on Olympus!"

I saw him dip into the velvet bag. I ran. Janice was facing him and I knew what would happen next. My body hurtled into her and knocked her sprawling. Caroll shrieked with rage and surprise.

I could not look at him. To look was death. And yet with him behind me we could not leave the room. It was only a question of time until he brought me face to face with the Gorgon's head.

The gun that had dropped from the guard's lifeless fingers lay on the floor and I scooped it up. What good it could do me I didn't know. For I could not turn to use it.

Caroll knew that too. I heard him laughing as he pattered toward me on sandalled feet.

"Look!" he screamed. "Look at Medusa!"

I fired blindly behind me and knew that he had stopped. And then, from the well of memories, I had the answer. Another man had once slain a Gorgon, and I knew how he had done it.

One of the dead guards wore a belt with a silver buckle. I bent and tore it open and pulled off the belt. The buckle was initialed, but it was smooth in back. It made a passable mirror.

I held the buckle high. Behind me Morton Caroll moved forward holding Medusa's face toward me. I could see it clearly in the buckle. Perseus had had a shield; I had this bit of silver. It was enough.

I fired behind me once, then again and again. A red splotch appeared on Caroll's white gown. Another stain spread over his chest. He was falling, falling on the Medusa's head.

I ran then, ran and lifted Janice's inert body and carried it to the place where the guards had been concealed. There was a door behind those draperies and we went through it and through the room beyond. Then we were outside.

It had stopped raining, but thunder still rumbled and there were flashes of lightning nearby. Carrying Janice I raced over the lawn, slid on the wet grass, and fell. Quickly I bent to lift her again, and at the same time looked back at the temple.

I saw the flash that came down out of the black sky. A roar of thunder shook the hill and flame shot upward out of the white temple. Within seconds the temple was a mass of flames. Whatever was inside would perish. And rightly so. Caroll had dabbled in things that are better left alone.

I turned away and felt Janice Perry stir in my arms. She felt warm. Her eyes opened. Now they were clear. It was plain she did not know where she was nor what had happened. There was no reason to tell her. One of her arms stole around my neck as we went through the gate.

I carried her all the way down the hill. And enjoyed every step.

END

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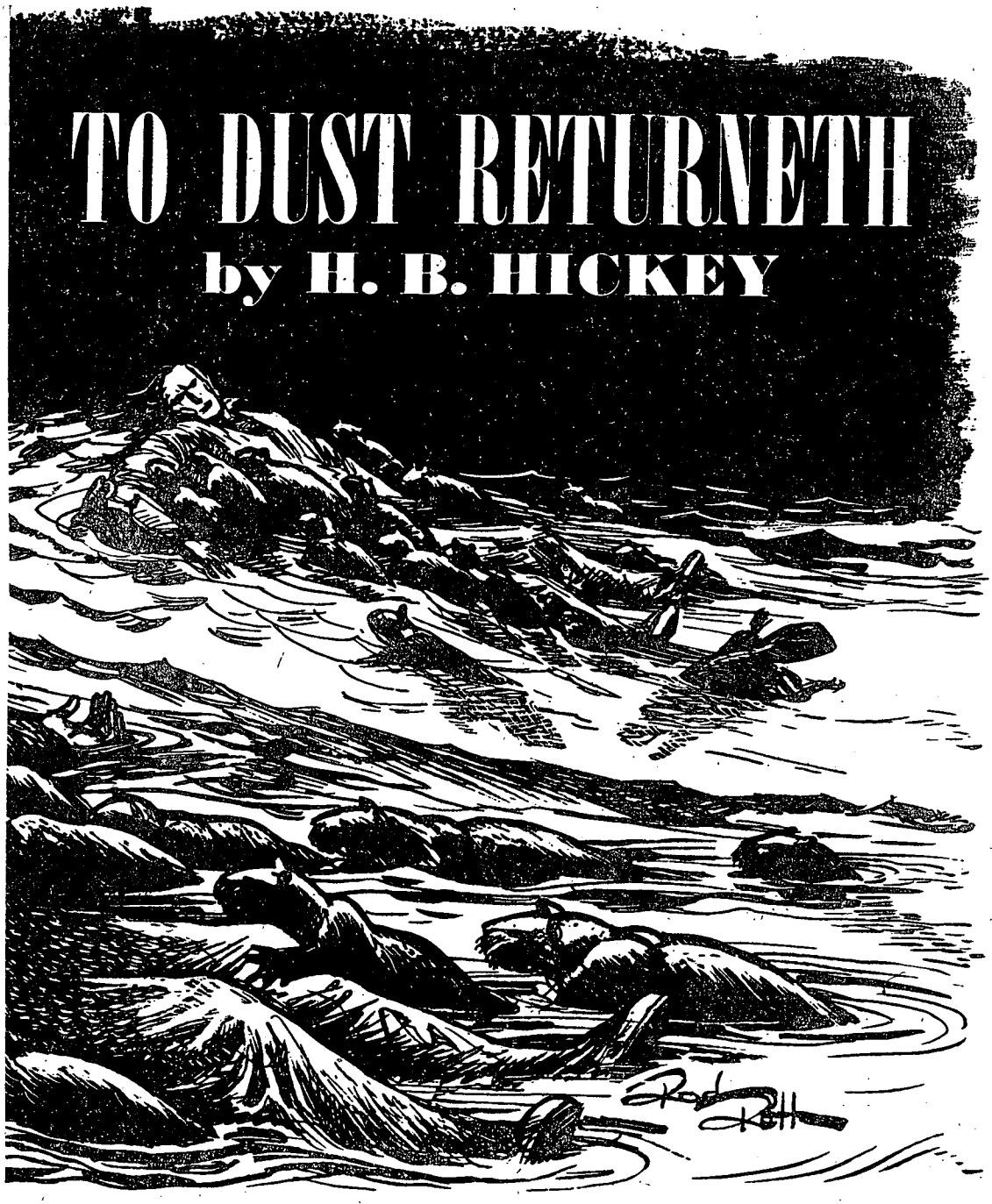

"WHY the devil," Mello puffed, "Do they have to fight on a hot day like this?"

The sweat ran down the big detective sergeant's back as he ran toward the corner. A moment before he had stopped to cool off under a tree near the intersection of two "Gold Coast" streets and from there had seen the fight start.

A huge, flashily dressed man had

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come out of a mansion near the corner and walked toward the intersection. As he reached it and turned to cross the street he had run into a tall, thin fellow who came around the side of the corner building. For a moment the two stared at each other and then the battle had been joined.

At first the thin man had the advantage but the other's weight soon began to tell. By the time Mello had covered half the distance to the corner the bigger man had his opponent down in the middle of the intersection and was intent on choking the life from him.

The detective put on a burst of speed and was almost on them when he heard the crack of a neck breaking. Too late! The big fellow's back concealed the victim's body but his loosened attitude said the fight was over.

Mello grabbed a handful of the flashy suit and hauled the burly one to his feet. "You've killed him!" the detective roared. "You had him licked, why'd you have to—"

He stopped abruptly. But for himself and the man whose collar he held the street was empty!

Mello blinked and looked again. It was true; the victim was gone! But where? The solid concrete under his feet offered no clues. It was twenty feet to the closest place of concealment and Mello was sure no one had moved.

For a second Mello doubted his sanity; perhaps the heat had affected his mind! He stared at the other and was reassured. The killer's face mirrored his own bewilderment. The hair on Mello's neck rose and the cold fear of the unknown gripped his spine. A ghost? No, he decided, no ghost had cracked the big man's lip. A bit of blood still dripped from a fresh cut on the other's fleshy mouth. Mello twisted the collar tighter.

"What the devil is going on here?" he asked.

The big man was too stunned to reply. There was fear mingled with astonishment on his features and for a second his mouth worked soundlessly. He struggled to pull himself together and at last succeeded somewhat.

"Who? What?—" he mumbled.

"Where did he go?" Mello insisted. He pulled out his badge and flashed it at the other. "Well?" he demanded.

"I—I don't know what you're talking about. Where did who go?"

"The guy you were fighting with! Don't try to pull that innocent act on me!"

"I wasn't fightin' with anyone," the big man protested.

"Then who cut your lip?" Mello demanded.

The other had regained his composure. "I bumped into a door. Is that a crime?"

Mello glared at him. He could imagine the scene at headquarters if he brought the big man in. On what charge? Of having a split lip? The detective shook his head groggily. He was positive it had been no mirage, and yet, where was the body?

"Look, copper," the big man growled, "I'm Jim Moyne. I live across the street there. If it's conversation you want come around later. Right now I've got to be goin', if you don't mind."

"All right. Be on your way then."

Mello watched Moyne cross the street and mount the stairs of the Simms residence. Then the detective turned his gaze down to study the street. If he hoped to find any trace of the victim he was disappointed. . . .

THE two men in the back booth at Pete's "Rocketeers' Cafe" were the recipients of many questioning glances from the habitues of that dive for they were definitely out of place. They were

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the only ones in the cafe who wore suits instead of the usual leather flying garb. Their faces, in sharp contrast with those of the other patrons, were pale and ascetic.

It was obvious that they were waiting for someone because every few seconds the taller of the two, a slender, black-haired fellow, turned to look at the door. His shorter, stockier companion kept his eyes glued to the untouched drink before him.

Their wait was soon terminated for they were joined by another couple, who, it was apparent, were no strangers to the place. If possible, they were even harder and tougher than the rocketeers around them.

The newcomers looked down at the two in the booth for a second and then one, a huge, black-whiskered fellow, spoke.

"I'm Jim Moyne. You the ones who wanted to see me?"

The slender man stood up. "I believe so. You are the gentlemen Mr.—ah—Pete spoke of?"

"That's right. This is my partner, Phil Simms." The big man waved in the direction of his companion, a small, but vicious-looking, character.

"Good! Allow me to introduce myself and my friend. This is Professor Harold Thorne and I am Stephen Dunn."

Howdy's and how-do-you-do's were exchanged, they all sat down, and then Moyne leaned forward in his chair.

"O.K. Now we've met, what's the pitch?"

At the puzzled looks which greeted his query he grinned.

"I mean what can we do for you? All Pete told us was that you wanted to rent a ship. If it was just that you could get newer and faster boats than ours, so there must be more to it. Let's hear the rest, huh?"

It was again Dunn who replied.

"Well, gentlemen, the rest is simple. We wish to engage a ship for a, shall we say risky, voyage . . . to Venus," he added.

Simms set down an emptied glass and stared at him thoughtfully.

"What's so risky about a hop to Venus?" he wanted to know. "You could book passage on one of the big liners for that."

His cold eyes were suspicious.

"You are right. That much could be easy. But we wish to go to a certain part of Venus—"

Dunn paused for effect. "To Hanan!"

Two pairs of eyebrows shot up. Moyne quickly recovered.

"Shall we say, uh, risky?" he mimicked Dunn. "Hell, man, that ain't risky, it's suicide! No wonder you couldn't get a ship!"

He shook his head. "Uh-uh, count me out! It'd take a million bucks to get me for *that* trip!"

"It should be worth two million, Mr. Moyne!"

"Wha—! Did I hear you right? For two million, mister, I'll take you to hell and back. What do *you* say, Phil?"

The other grinned. "You can say that again!"

But the burly Moyne was again suspicious.

"I still don't get it. We're not the only guys who could use that dough. Pete told us you've tried almost everyone else. Why'd they turn you down?"

"Because we haven't got the two million. In fact, we haven't more than two thousand."

Moyne was growing angrier by the minute.

"What kind of run-around are you two giving us?" he snarled. "We didn't come here to play guessin' games. Now you better start talkin', see? And talk straight. What's your game?"

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HIS threatening scowl loosened the tongue of the heretofore silent Thorne.

"Now, gentlemen, please be calm. We—we are in earnest."

His frightened voice faltered, then began again.

"This is our story. Mr. Dunn, here, is a librarian. Several weeks ago he came across an interesting manuscript in the "old books" vault of the main library. It was a story written two centuries ago by one of the early space explorers. This man had been forced down in Hanan and had lost his ship in a storm. But he managed to stay alive and finally, regained his ship and was able to get out again—one of the few men ever to escape from that awful place.

"Now that alone, though interesting, would mean nothing to us, except—" he paused again, "except that in telling me this story—I am a physicist—Mr. Dunn described to me some strange rocks which this man had found in his wanderings. He had picked together a handful of them which he tied in his handkerchief. In the excitement of finding his ship he left this bundle behind."

He stopped again, temporarily out of breath. The rocketeers waited for him to resume.

"Well, gentlemen, the description of these rocks, and the description of some burns he later found on his hands interested me. The next day I went to the vault with Mr. Dunn and read the account for myself. There was even a chart showing the location of the package. Gentlemen, on reading his minute description of those rocks and those burns—which proved later to be malignant and caused his death—I became certain of it. That man had unknowingly left behind a bundle of—"

This time the pause was for effect.

"—Almost pure tririum! I estimate that even that small amount should be worth four or five million dollars."

"Whew!"

The cold, calculating eyes of the small, stringy rocketeer met the hotly avaricious ones of the black-visaged Moyne. Simms reflected for a moment and then spoke up.

"How do we know it's still there? Maybe other storms have come up since then and blown the stuff a thousand miles from where he left it. It's a mighty long shot that it's still in the same place."

"I doubt it. He recalled having dropped the package in a sheltered crevice of a huge rock. The account states that although the winds shift rapidly in Hanan, this spot was completely protected. Therefore, the contents should be safe, though the kerchief itself has rotted long ago. Well, gentlemen, what do you say?"

"Just a minute, partner, do I understand that if we find this tririum, it's fifty-fifty? Equal shares for all of us?

"Precisely. Share and share alike."

"And forget to declare it at interplanet customs? Otherwise you would have got government ships."

Again the glances met. Thorne nodded greedily.

"It's a deal! We're your men!"

As they left the cafe Dunn looked at Harold Thorne.

"Do you think it was wise to tell them what we expect to find? We agreed not to, you know."

The sandy-haired professor nodded.

"But after all, that's why the others refused us. Had they known the stakes involved they might not have turned us down."

Stephen Dunn's eyes were troubled behind his thick lensed glasses. "Still, I don't quite trust them. That burly fellow looks as though he'd kill a man

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for much less than two million. And that Simms 'hath a lean and hungry look' if you'll pardon the quotation."

"Oh, don't be an old lady! You can't expect men like that to look and talk like librarians and physicists. They were no worse than any of the others. Now let's forget it and go get our things together."

THEIR "things" consisted of several pairs of metallic gloves and a small can, heavily coated with lead. Two days later they and the equipment were loaded aboard an old and disreputable-looking ship at the blastport. The "Sloth" was an appropriate enough name for her.

Dunn turned a troubled gaze on Simms as the latter closed the vacuum-hatch.

"Are you certain this craft will be safe, Mr. Simms? It looks rather shabby compared with some of the others."

Simms was reassuring.

"Don't worry, she's spaceworthy, all right. Now, let's make sure you and Thorne are strapped in properly."

He checked the straps which held the two in the anti-gravity chairs. They were secure.

"O.K., Jim. Get set to go!"

On the control tower at the end of the field a green light flashed and the men on the Sloth braced themselves. Beneath them the tubes hummed, surprisingly smooth and powerful sounding.

At the controls Moyne watched an indicator slowly climb to the thousand mark, and then, as it reached that point, pulled back the release.

A sudden roar, a slight strain at the belts, and they were off. Almost instantly the blue sky and bright day changed as they left the atmosphere and were supplanted by the ever-black of the void. As the pull of earth faded away the steady roar of the tubes was displaced by an occasional bark which was enough to sustain momentum.

As Thorne began to unstrap himself Moyne whirled in the pilot's seat. "You can if you want to, but I wouldn't if I was you. It's not like one of those big liners, you know. We're likely to pass a big chunk of somethin' or other and this boat'll go into a spin that'll tear your guts out. Better sit tight till we get to Venus."

Thorne looked paler than usual as he retightened the belt. He and Dunn sat tense, silent and unmoving, as the ship hurled itself toward its objective. Time passed very slowly. The two at the control-board were intent on the gauges and indicators and found no time for conversation, even with each other.

At long last a pin-point of light emerged from the darkness and swiftly grew until it filled their view completely. The retarding rockets slowed the craft and the pull of the cloud-bound planet took over the job of bringing her in. As the ship slowed down Moyne left his seat and walked back to his passengers.

"Better give me that chart now. We're almost there."

Thorne handed it to him.

As he looked at the map a pleased expression spread over the burly man's features.

"Say, this makes it easier! Why didn't you two tell us this thing was oriented from the Azure Valley and Thors River. This'll double our chance of finding that boulder."

He turned to Simms.

"Head for Azure Valley, Phil. We'll try it from there."

The ship veered to the south, its speed down to seven hundred miles per hour and its automatic sextant aiming her like an arrow at the target.

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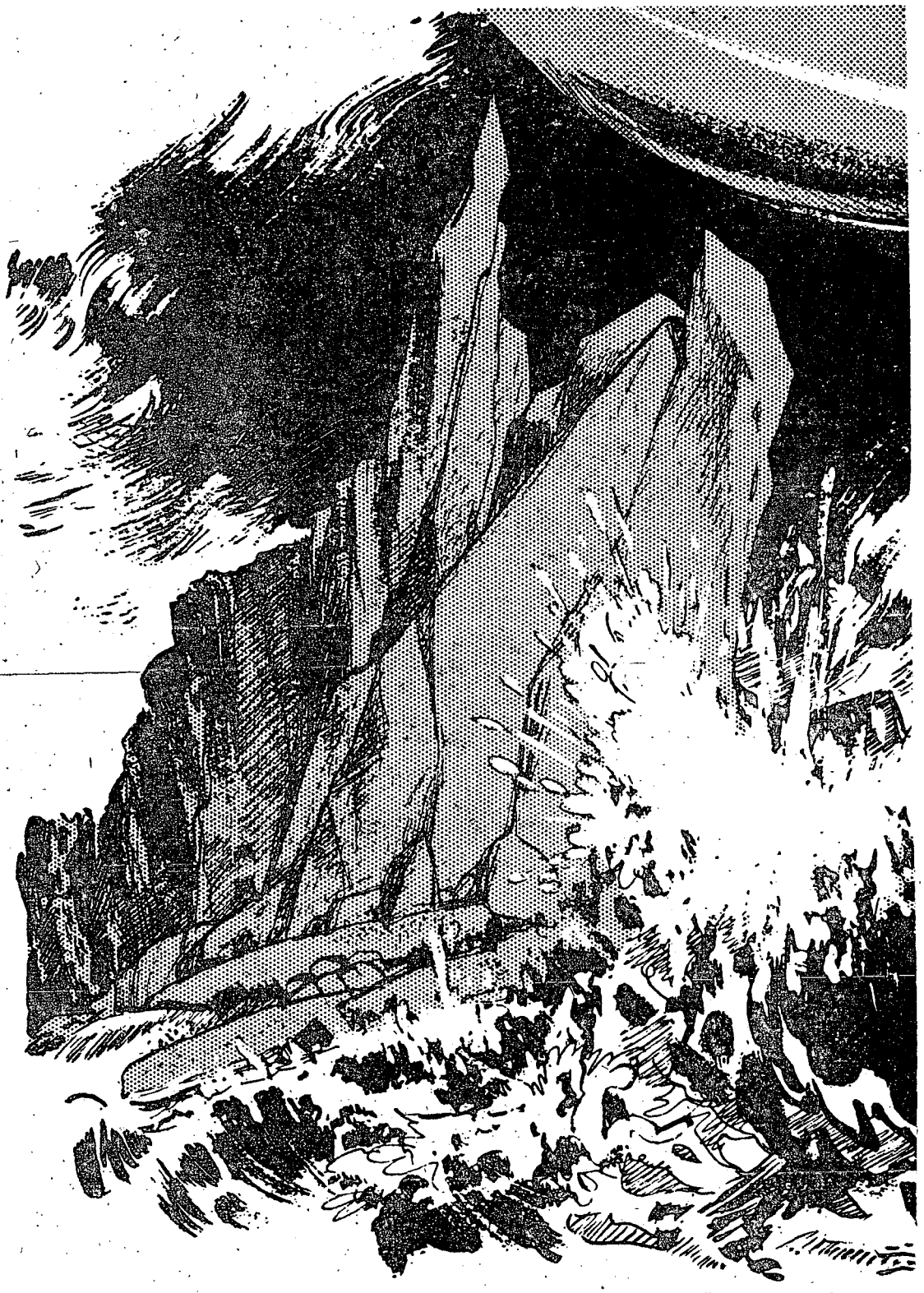
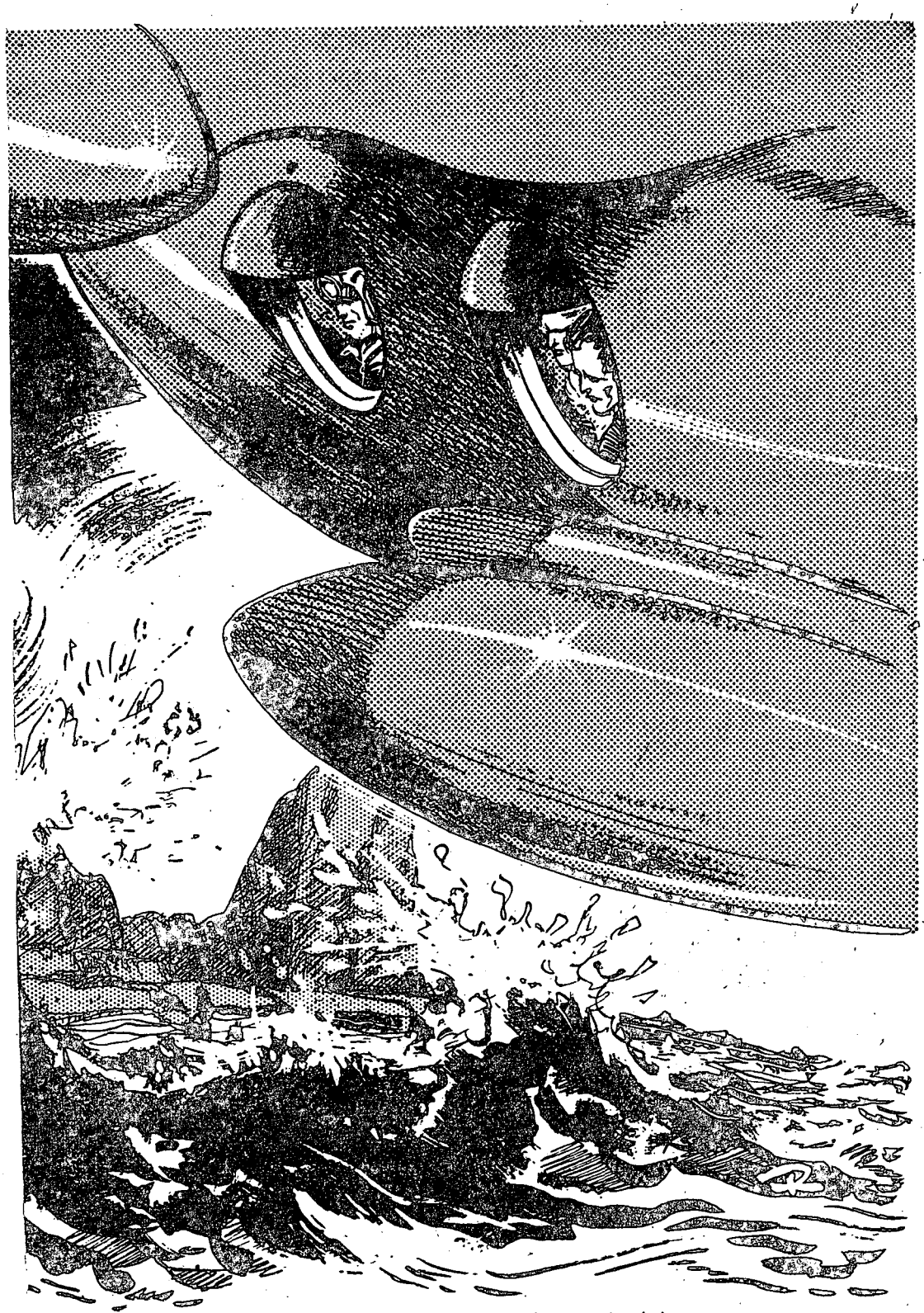


And then the ship burst through the fog into the red hell of Venus, with



jagged crags looming on all sides and a tumultuous red sea waiting below . . .

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Ten minutes later the Sloth swung her nose down and slid into the sea of white which obscured Venus. Thorne and Dunn tensed. How could they know for certain what lay on the other side of that cloud blanket?

THEY had not long to wait, for at twenty thousand feet the clouds thinned to a fog. Beneath them the light blue of Azure Valley stretched into the distance, and off to the right was a ribbon of silver which, as they drew nearer, grew to a wide turbulent river, the Thors.

Simms held the ship motionless for a while as he studied the chart. Then he headed for a spot equidistant from both river and valley. As they reached the exact place he wanted he swung the Sloth back to the north.

"Here we go! If what they say is true this'll be the toughest part of it by far."

Moyne was quick to agree.

"Yeah! We'll have to come in slow for fear of hittin' somethin' and those winds will throw us around plenty."

He looked at their passengers. "Still, your old pal made it and so will we." His jaw tightened. "Four million bucks is a lot of dough."

The long valley and nearby river were soon left behind and gradually the flat country was replaced by rolling lands which led them into the foothills of the vast mountain ranges which encircled Hanan. The few scattered settlements which lay below them vanished into the distance and a feeling of loneliness overtook the four on the Sloth. As the ship neared the first peaks Simms looked back.

"Better make sure your belts are tight. We're goin' straight up."

The craft reared back, and the tubes began a steady throb again as she rose. Up, up into the white layer she soared while the altimeter showed thirty, forty, and fifty thousand feet. At seventy they broke through and straightened out for perhaps two hundred miles due north. Then back to the clouds, but this time at a snail's pace. The tension mounted as the minutes dragged by.

Suddenly they were in the grip of an aerial whirlpool. The Sloth was first whirled like a huge top, then spun end over end as though she were a football crossing the bar.

The four inside could tell only by watching each other that it was the ship, not they, that was spinning. Thorne and Dunn cowered in terror and sweat glistened on Moyne's dark face. Only Simms was calm, playing the controls as delicately as a keyboard in the hands of a master. Somehow, he kept the ship toward its objective, here bucking a cross-wind, then holding her back as a downdraft threatened to suck her down too fast.

All the while the altimeter dropped, but if they had expected release they were doomed to disappointment. At ten thousand the maelstrom and the murk still held them fast, and at five thousand Simms, too, began to sweat.

"Isn't this damn thing ever going to end?" he cursed. "We'll hit bottom soon!"

No one answered.

But suddenly, there was a letup. The tortured craft was free again, master of her own fate. The long glide continued smoothly now down through the thick soup and at three thousand they were out of it, into the open.

And into the red hell of Venus! A millenium before the first rocket ship had landed on this planet the last volcano had closed the last pass but tales of Hanan abounded in the folklore of Venus. The handful of men whose ships had been sucked into its vortices and who had been able to get out again had

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added confirmation to the old tales. For a moment the four were spellbound.

THE very air glowed red about them, colored by the land beneath. Rock was piled on rock and where there were no rocks the red sand shifted like the waves of a sea. And the sea! Wine red, its roaring surf was like the froth of Sparkling Burgundy.

Jim Moyne broke the silence. "Well, I'll be damned, but this beats 'em all! A grapejuice ocean!"

Simms interrupted. "Quit gawking, Jim, and see if you can spot that boulder. It should be within a few miles of us."

Speedily, the other three leaped to the portholes and began a survey of the landscape. It was Thorne who saw it first, rising out of the surrounding rocks.

"There it is! Off to the left."

Simms brought the Sloth around to the left and slid it lower to get a better look. "That's it, all right. See the hollow on the south side of it? But where'll we land? Can't set her down here."

Dunn supplied the answer. "There's a wide stretch of beach about a mile down. Perhaps we could land there. It looks smooth enough."

Simms swung back toward the shore. The beach was there all right. Ten minutes later the four swung down from the hatch and dropped, with their equipment, to the ground.

"Let's go now. Hurry it up!" Moyne was trembling with eagerness. But Thorne had suddenly stooped to examine the sand.

"Very interesting," he muttered half aloud, "I've never seen this before. Obviously of volcanic origin."

Moyne seized his shoulder. "For pete's sake, you can play with the sand later! Let's get to that big rock."

He pulled Thorne away with him.

The ascent from the beach was steep and by the end of the first half mile all four were panting. The rest of the way was over rocks whose jagged edges cut their shoes. They had to pause for rest within sight of their goal.

"Let's wait a minute and catch our breath," Dunn puffed.

They sat for a short while in silence. Finally, they were ready again, but Thorne had again interested himself in a strange rock nearby. It was twenty feet wide and as flat as a board. Moyne had to drag him away again.

"But really," he protested, "that wasn't a rock at all. It was a petrified tree. Strange shape, wasn't it?"

He began to mumble again. "Wonder if there is animal life here. Should be most interesting."

He was jerked back to life by a shout from Simms who had gone ahead of the others.

"There's something here all right!"

He pointed to a crack under a ledge in the great hollow of the boulder. The others rushed to his side.

There was a let-down feeling. In the crevice lay a handful of tarnished bits of metal which had once been silvery bright. There was nothing about them to indicate their value.

Moyne looked askance at them. "Are you guys sure this is tririum?"

Thorne smiled. "Yes. It tarnishes in the open air. You may touch a piece if you wish. If it is tririum it will feel quite warm."

Moyne touched it and was satisfied.

"Are you sure that touch won't burn me like it did that other guy?" he asked Thorne.

"You needn't worry; the reason he was burned was that he carried them about so long. Tririum's rate of disintegration is very slow; its value lies in the fact that the rate can be regulated under certain conditions and be

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He stood there holding his arm and staring at the body

made to supply a larger and more steady flow of energy than any other radioactive substance known."

He was about to continue his dissertation when Simms interrupted him. "I've got an idea," he said. "Let's see if we can't find some more of that stuff lyin' around. A couple of million bucks more wouldn't hurt!"

THORNE disillusioned him quickly. "The reason these were found was because they were the only small stones our adventurer saw in all the time he was here."

He paused, looked up, and spoke again. "We'd better hurry anyway. I don't like the looks of those clouds over there."

The others followed his glance and saw the black cumulus piling high on the horizon. A strong breeze blew up and in a moment turned to a wind. Thorne hastened to throw the treasure into the lead-lined canister. Then they turned to go.

Too late! The red of the sands about them was already darkening to a deep purple as the light was blocked off increasingly by the onrushing cloud masses. The wind had become a gale.

In his mind, Moyne measured the distance to the rocket ship.

"Hold it!" he warned, "we'll never make it. Better to hole up here where we're safe until it blows over."

The other three readily assented. It was apparent that the storm would be on them in a matter of seconds. The darkness grew ever deeper and was broken only by flashes of lightning which illuminated the scene with a red flame as from an inferno.

Thunder which threatened their eardrums rolled in, wave upon wave, until the ground beneath trembled, and the rain was no rain but rather the ocean being inverted.

It was incredible that the few feet of ground under the ledge could escape the torrent. Yet it did, and the four huddled there remained dry.

What had seemed an age was in reality a matter of minutes and the abrupt end of the storm found them unready, still shaken with fear, although the skies were clearing. The sudden stillness left them as limp as

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they had been tense before.

Moyne rallied them to action. "Come on, let's get going before we're caught in another one." He shuddered. "No wonder this is called the "red hell of Venus."

They slid down the wet rocks and headed for the beach in silence, still shaken by the elemental fury from which they had so miraculously escaped. A hot breeze had followed on the heels of the storm and the ground began to give up the moisture in a thin pink vapor.

And the ship was gone!

The four stood stunned as the awful realization of what that meant came to them. It might have been expected yet had never occurred to them, perhaps held back by unwillingness to face the terrible implications.

Suddenly, Simms began to curse. A stream of imprecations poured from him which did not abate until his burly partner seized him by the collar and shook him speechless.

"Now don't get hysterical," Moyne warned him. "This jam we're in won't get thinner by swearin' and moanin' about it.

Thorne and Dunn hastened to agree. "You're right," the latter said. "We had better get started in a hurry if we are to escape from this awful place."

"The few people who have managed to leave Hanan alive," added Thorne, "had the advantage of being nearer the surrounding mountains than we. Apparently we are in almost the center of Hanan and it is a good three week trek to those mountains from here."

Moyne grunted disgustedly. "I've been in some pretty tight spots in my days but never one like this. It'll take more than a miracle to pull us out."

By common consent Moyne had assumed leadership, and the others turned to the big man questioningly.

"O.K.," he said, "we came in from the south so we'll head south. The mountains are supposed to be a little lower there, too. We'll take turns carryin' the can."

He paused and stared at the others. "Anybody got any other ideas?"

THEY shook their heads dispiritedly and he sneered. "I can see you're goin' to be a big help. Well, before we get goin' I want to say one thing. It's every man for himself now. If you drop you stay here." He bent to pick up the container. "Might as well hold on to this as long as we can."

He turned on his heel and headed south along the beach but was halted by a cry from Simms.

"Look!" he screamed. "I see it! I see it!"

He jumped up and down in excitement and the others stared, thinking he had gone mad from fear. But as he continued to point they followed his gaze out to sea. Not a mile out they could see the familiar outlines of the Sloth!

Moyne glared at him. "Yeah! But how're we goin' to get to the ship, swim?"

They stared, amazed. "Why not?"

"I'll show you why not."

Moyne stooped at the edge of the shore and dipped his hand in the purple liquid. It stuck to his fingers as he tried to separate them.

"Because we couldn't swim ten yards in that goo! I noticed my shoe stuck before when I stepped in it by mistake." He shook his head. "We're no better off than we were before."

If they had been fearful before they were despairing now. With their ship in sight they would have to turn their backs to it and start afresh.

But new hope came from an unsuspected quarter. It was Thorne who

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supplied what looked like the answer.

"The rock! The rock!"

Then as the other three stared uncomprehending, he explained. "That rock I noticed before when we were climbing up from the beach! It was a petrified tree! If this water is so viscuous it should float well enough to get us to the ship!"

Hope flared in their eyes and this time Moyne had nothing to say. Glances met in silent understanding. This was indeed the last hope, for in their hearts they all knew how slim were the chances of reaching safety afoot. Already the hot arid breeze had weakened them perceptibly.

The four started up the beach with renewed vigor but if the climb had been arduous before it was torture now. The wind blew ever hotter and as the fluid was sucked from their tissues they could almost feel themeslves shriveling.

At last they reached the petrified tree but were faced with another problem immediately. With what could they cut it down?

Again Thorne supplied the answer. "The shovel! We left it under the ledge." He and Dunn, unused to physical exertion, showed the effects of their dehydration more than the two rocketeers, and he spoke through parched lips in a horrible croak.

Moyne hurried to the ledge and returned with the shovel with which he attacked the tree at its base. In a few seconds he had produced a large nick which he widened into a gash. Then, inserting the edge of the shovel in the gash, he split the tree across with a convulsive heave.

It was quickly lifted between the four and found surprisingly light. The grain showed only on the south edge, for centuries of north winds had sanded the rest to paper smoothness. It had also reduced the tree to its present thin state.

THE four slid down the rocks with their precious burden, unheedful of the cuts and bruises they were sustaining. Moyne retained the shovel while carrying his share of the slab.

They finally reached the shore and without wasting precious breath in talk threw themselves on to their raft. Moyne swung the shovel with vigor, using it as a paddle. But progress was pitifully slow; the gummy fluid seemed human in its determination to hold them back. It would surely take too long to reach the ship.

Dunn was the first to crack. "Wa—ter, wa—ter," he pleaded piteously.

But the hot wind blew equally on them all and no one would exert himself to even raise his head to speak to Dunn. Even the huge Moyne's strokes had become more spaced.

"Wa—ter." Thorne took up the hopeless cackle.

Moyne looked at him in disgust. "A big help, you and your buddy," the rocketeer muttered. "Save your skins for you and then have to split the dough."

He stopped abruptly and stared at Simms. There was complete understanding in the glance that passed between them. Why split at all?

The two watched Dunn and Thorne for a few moments, noting the lassitude which had overtaken them. Even the strength to cry for water had left.

Simms nodded to Moyne. No chance of a struggle which might upset the raft on which their lives so precariously rested. Each of the rocketeers picked a man, Simms edging closer to the slender Dunn while Moyne turned slightly to face Thorne.

Then each, with a single thrust of his leg, sent his victim overboard!

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There was but a slight splash and the deed was done.

From Dunn came a high moan which ended in a gurgle as the purple liquid poured into his throat. Thorne struggled silently for a second or two and then became, too, an inert bundle floating on the surface, for the specific gravity of the "water" was too high for the two to sink.

The short rollers tossed and turned the pair and while Moyne and Simms watched, coated them so they were soon indistinguishable from the fluid around them. Gathering dusk spread its mantle and the breeze whispered a requiem.

Growing darkness cooled the enervating wind and with the raft lightened, Moyne's strokes had more effect. The sea had become luridly phosphorescent and the rocket ship showed black against the sea of cold flame.

Slowly, the ship grew larger in their view and at last loomed over them. Fortunately the hatch on the underbelly was directly above Simms, and with an assisting lift from Moyne he was able to reach and open it. With the aid of a rope he let down his burly partner soon joined him inside and together they fell on the water bottles which hung fastened on the wall.

"Ah! Ah!" Simms crooned ecstatically. "Champagne was never so good!"

Moyne agreed. "I haven't been so thirsty since the time we got lost beyond Pluto and our water gave out." He shook his head. "Well, Phil, this'll be our last trip. I'm goin' to settle down and enjoy a couple of million bucks worth of wine, women and song."

Simms chortled with glee. "I'm goin' to get me a big house with servants and butlers and throw one big party for the rest of my life!"

The little man stopped dead, his mouth open in dismay. "That can! Jim, where's the can?"

Moyne laughed at him. "I tied it to the end of the rope beforeI climbed up."

His partner rushed to the still open hatch and quickly hauled up the container with its precious contents. Together the two closed and bolted the hatch and prepared to shove off. The tubes began their thrum and with a fiery blast they were on their way.

Simms took a short look back. "So long, suckers! Don't worry! We'll spend your dough for you!"

Moyne joined him in a long laugh . . .

BACK on the sea the glow was broken here and there by little beaver-like animals whom the increasing darkness had brought from beneath the surface. Glistening black and oily they had no difficulty in making their way through the rollers toward the human driftwood they scented.

Quickly a group of the animals gathered about the two bodies and began nosing them shoreward. Although interrupted at intervals by sudden squalls, progress was steady and when the light of dawn replaced the phosphorescence it found them with their salvage close to the beach.

The two men were rolled onto the shore, and as the dry heat hardened the purple juice on them into a coating, they were pushed by long snouts toward a tall pile of rocks.

Once reached, there was disclosed between the rocks an age-worn trail leading up to a cave, and it was into this the bodies were rolled. Here they were added to a group of animals in the same condition as they. Although a thick film of crimson dust on the group disclosed that they had lain in the pile for a long time there was no odor of decay.

The beaver-like creatures gathered about the two men curiously. It was

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apparent that man was to them a strange animal. At first the bodies were sniffed at and then more boldly approached. Instinct told the beavers that this, too, was food.

One of them, apparently the leader, stuck out a long, red tongue and began to lick the dried coating from the bodies. He was soon joined by the others who fell to with a will. In a matter of seconds the casing was reduced to a thin, almost invisible film which covered Dunn and Thorne from head to toe.

Suddenly Thorne's eyes opened! Directly before them was a long, red tongue! Almost staring into his eyes were the beady black ones of the beaver who had been working on his face.

With a horrified shriek Thorne leaped to his feet. He turned to flee and in doing so kicked the inert Dunn and stumbled over him, waking him. In a flash the two were on their feet, kicking and waving at the beavers who, no less frightened than they, retreated into a far corner and huddled there.

"What happened? What are we doing here?" Dunn asked Thorne.

"I don't know," the physicist replied. "When I woke up a few seconds before you did I was being stared in the face by one of those little beasts there. The last thing I can remember is being kicked into the sea by that brute, Moyne."

"That's my last recollection, too," the other agreed. "I hit the water and felt it pour into my throat and nose and then the next thing I knew I awoke to find you falling over me."

"But how did we get here, wherever we are?"

"Evidently the little beasts brought us here." Thorne shuddered. "Maybe they were going to eat us."

"Well, we needn't fear now. They're more frightened of us than vice versa."

"There is one thing more I don't understand," Thorne wondered, "and it's this. Before we were pushed overboard we were almost dead of thirst. Our throats were so parched we couldn't speak. Yet neither of us is having any difficulty now. As for myself, I can feel no effects of that thirst at all."

Dunn nodded amazed agreement. "That hadn't occurred to me. I feel as well as ever."

"There's another thing. We both are covered with a very fine film of lacquer or similar substance. Yet it is flexible and gives me no discomfort. How about you?"

"I hadn't noticed mine before. Maybe these little animals put it on us to preserve us."

Thorne looked about him and observed the pile of dusty animals near them. "This seems to be their storehouse. We were apparently to be added to their food supply. Ugh!"

HE WALKED over to the pile to get a closer look. One of the animals, which was the size of a rat, had the same thin film as he and Dunn. Thorne picked it out of the pile and held it up. As he did so its eyes opened and it gave a high bark. The physicist dropped it.

As it hit the floor of the cavern it turned on him with a snarl and attacked. His reflexive kick sent it smashing into the wall of the cave.

The little beast vanished! Before their very eyes it disappeared!

For a moment the two men were too stunned to speak. They stared wildly at each other.

"What happened?" Dunn asked.

"I don't know." Thorne was bewildered. "But I've got a hunch it's very important to find out."

For a second he reflected silently. Then, "When I kicked it the beast felt

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solid. It must have been or it would not have carried to the wall. Yet it did vanish!"

The physicist walked to the wall and examined it carefully. There was no opening. Then Thorne bent to examine the floor. All that was visible was a bit of fine purplish dust which blew away as he tried to pick it up on a finger.

For a short while Thorne remained bent over as though unable to straighten. He was profoundly shocked.

"What's the matter? What is it?" Dunn wanted to know.

"I think I've found the answer." The physicist straightened and walked toward Dunn. Thorne's face was a study in horror!

Dunn recoiled from him in terror. "Wha-what is it? Why are you staring that way?"

The other man shook himself back to speech. His face resumed a more normal appearance. "I know what's happened to us."

"Well, what's happened? Speak, man!"

"All right. You'd better brace yourself for a shock . . ." He paused.

"Go on."

"You may have noticed the faint luminosity of that pile of animals and the thick purple coat on each of them. That coat comes from the liquid in the sea out there. That liquid has a strange radioactivity. We, too, must have been covered with it when we were brought in here. It saved our lives . . ."

He was too shaken by emotion to continue for a while.

"Go on," Dunn urged him.

Thorne seemed not to hear him but soon went on.

"It saved our lives . . . but we're not quite alive either . . ."

Dunn was frantic. "For God's sake, man, explain yourself!"

"I shall. These little beavers which brought us here eat the animals and would have eaten us . . . have eaten us . . . Oh! It's fantastic and yet I can't think of any other explanation. . . . Somehow that liquid preserves the life force in our bodies But it extracts and absorbs into itself the *substance* of our bodies!"

"And so they've already . . ." Dunn could say no more.

THORNE nodded. "And so they don't eat our bodies. They just eat the purple coating and get the nourishment they need. We remain held together by some strange interaction of our life force and the almost invisible film which covers us. When either snaps, as one or both did when that rat hit the wall, the entire structure disintegrates. No sooner or later . . ."

'How soon," Dunn asked him, "do you think . . .?"

"The film seems very strong. Remember that the kick alone was not sufficient to disintegrate the rat. But . . . what difference does it make how long?' '

"Because I don't intend those two thieves to enjoy our money. Somehow we're going to get back to earth . . . and when we do . . ."

Thorne's eyes flared with hatred. "And when we do . . ." He nodded. "We'd better get started."

They followed the purple-tinted ray of light that came from the cavern's mouth and soon found themselves outside. The two stood blinking, adjusting themselves to the outdoor brightness.

"Which way shall we go from here?" Dunn asked.

Thorne thought for a moment. "Let's climb one of these hillocks and see if we can't get our bearings."

Slowly, painfully, they clambered up

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a small hill near the mouth of the cave. Each sharp point was carefully avoided for fear of the fatal puncture which might follow.

Thorne saw the rock first. "There it is," he pointed out to Dunn.

"Yes. It's the one where we found the tririum."

"Right. We're south of it now. We'll continue south until we reach the moun-

As his fingers closed around the soft throat it seemed as if the body was vanishing . . .

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tains. Might as well use the plan we had before."

The long trek started. Months were to pass before the mountains were reached. Every danger must be avoided, a shelter in view for protection from each impending storm.

Fortunately hunger and thirst were no bar. All bodily functions had ceased and across the fantastically jumbled red wasteland of Hanan the living dead implacably plodded toward revenge!

The mountains were traversed inch by horrible inch. Thunderous avalanches roared down toward them and each icy pass was a slide to eternity. Miraculously the two escaped . . .

. . . From the south side of the range Thorne and Dunn could see in the distance the gleaming thread that was the Thors river and to one side the mists above the Azure Valley.

"Look . . . at last . . ." Dunn's voice shook, and were it possible he would have cried.

"Yes, we've made it at last."

For a moment they paused and then Dunn asked, "How are we going to explain to people when they—?"

"Why explain? It will only make more explanations necessary."

"We could bring Interplanetary Customs into the case . . ."

"And have Moyne and Simms get off with a jail sentence? No. That would hardly satisfy me."

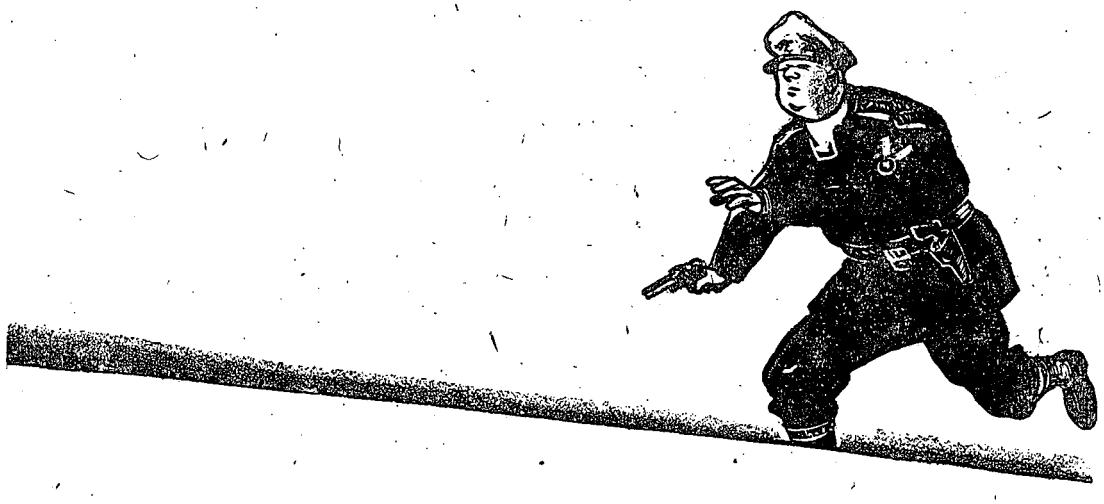
"Nor me. But how then can we get transportation back to earth?"

Thorne pondered. Then, "It should be simple. No one must see us. From now on we travel by night. By day we take cover. Somewhere in the Azure Valley there is an interplanetary blastport. We'll wait until a large freighter is being loaded for a trip to earth and then sneak aboard and stow away. Once we've landed the rest will be easy."

"And pleasureful . . ." Dunn supplied.

. . . Luckily the port was deserted except for the few men who were busy loading the freighter with bundles of the tall rushes which grew on the banks of the Thors and had such great medicinal value.

THE two men crept along the shadows created by the floodlights which lit the fort. Unobserved, they drew close to the loading crew. One of the hands was speaking.



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"Boy, I sure wish I was goin' along on this baby. It's been a year since I've seen the gang at Pete's. Especially the gals."

He drew a laugh. "So you don't go for these Venusian women, eh?"

"Nah! That scaly skin gives me the feelin' I'm makin' love to a fish!"

"You'll get used to it in time. We did."

"Not me. I just made up my mind that when this boat makes her next trip I'm goin' to be on it."

In the shadow of a bulkhead Thorne whispered to Dunn. 'We're in luck! This ship is going to the Chicago port and we're going to be on it!"

"How?"

"When the men go back for another load we'll dash up the ramp. Once we're inside the ship we'll find a place to hide."

Tensely they waited their chance. At last the loading car from which the rushes had been brought was empty and the crew rolled it toward a warehouse at the edge of the field.

Quickly Thorne and Dunn scampered up the ramp. Inside the ship they could hear voices but the inside crew was too busy stacking the bundles in the rear hold to notice the intrusion.

"There, in the supply room, behind those cases," Thorne grunted.

They darted silently into the supply room and were quickly hidden behind a tall stack of wooden crates which were lashed in a corner. They waited breathlessly in the dark for the starting hum of the tubes.

At last they could hear a door slam and then the hurried goodbyes of the ship's crew to the men on the ground below. The tubes began their low thrumming which built into a roar and then they were on their way.

"At least this is more comfortable than that decrepit thing we came in," Dunn muttered to Thorne.

"It must be at least three times as large," Thorne conjectured. "I should say three hundred feet."

Dunn was worried. "What if someone comes in here and discovers us?"

"I don't think that will happen," Thorne whispered. "These crates are tied to hold together through the voyage."

Several times it seemed they would surely be discovered but their luck held good. After what felt like ages they could hear the anti-gravity tubes begin their steady bark. They were nearing their home planet!

"We've got to get out of here before the ship lands," Dunn whispered. "These crates are sure to be unloaded."

"Watch the door while I climb up on one and peek out the porthole," Thorne told him. "Maybe I can figure something out."

The ship had settled into its glide and from the porthole Thorne could see the earth rushing up at them. From their still great height he could see the sun climbing up the sky to bring dawn to the sleeping city below.

"Well," Dunn asked, "What do you see?"

"It will still be dark when we land. If this side of the ship is away from the hangars we'll be able to get out through this porthole."

The ship swung to the left as it came over the port and settled near the edge of the field on a long runway close to the road which led to the city.

Thorne unclamped the porthole and whispered down to Dunn. "Get up here beside me. We'll have a few seconds before the crew comes in. This side is in shadow and if we don't make too much noise we won't be caught."

He reached a hand down and assisted Dunn to his side. "Hurry!" he told him. "And be as quiet as you can. It's

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a ten foot drop so be careful.

DUNN slid through and as soon as his partner heard him hit the ground he, too, followed. Unhurt, they scrambled for the cover of the roadside shrubbery.

Behind them they could hear yells as the open porthole was discovered. It was obvious to the crew that it could not have been open throughout the trip. Quickly the two put space between themselves and the port.

It was light when they finally slowed down.

"We're safe now," Thorne told his companion.

"Yes, but now the real job begins. How are we to find those two blackguards? They may even have left the city."

"In a few hours the stores will be open and we can step into one and look in the phone book. If they're still here we can get their addresses."

They continued walking toward the city and by mid-morning had found a drug store and were thumbing through the telephone book. They soon found what they were looking for.

"Both of them are living on the 'Gold Coast,' Dunn muttered. They're enjoying our wealth all right." His voice dripped bitterness.

"Not for long."

They left the store and made their way toward a bus line which would take them to the other side of town. The small change in their pockets paid the fare and the two sat in the rear of the bus and plotted their next move.

"They live almost directly across the street from each other," Thorne told the tall librarian. "We had better split up when we leave the bus so if anything happens to one the other will get through. We can get together later at the same bus stop."

"Fine," the other agreed. "I'll go to Moyne's place and you can go around the block and get to Simm's from the other side."

They parted at the bus stop after solemnly shaking hands. It was a three block walk to Astor street and Dunn went straight ahead while Thorne took a roundabout path.

Thorne found the same number on the street behind Astor and went through the alley between that and Simms' house. The rocketeer had taken an old but still beautiful mansion and as Thorne watched he could see a maid come out to shake a small rug.

The physicist waited until she had reentered the house and then he stole up alongside a French window at the side. Through this he could see the interior, noting the rich furnishings and the drapery which hung at the window.

He tested it and found it unlocked. Stealthily he entered and slid behind the floor length drapery. He could hear voices in the next room.

"You'd better draw Mr. Simms' bath," he heard a male voice say. Then, "Say, that was some party last night, wasn't it?"

A hushed voice agreed and Thorne gritted his teeth.

In a few minutes he heard water running somewhere on the floor above him. He crept to the door and cautiously inched it open. There was no one in sight. The voices had moved to another part of the house.

To one side was a curving stairway to the rooms above and up this the intruder stole. The sound of running water grew louder and he quickly made his way toward it.

THERE was someone in the bathroom so he hid at the end of the hall behind a large book-case. In a little

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while the water was shut off and Thorne heard footsteps retreating down the hall. Quickly he slid into the bathroom and looked about.

The tub was in the far corner and next to it was the glassed in shower stall. In the middle of the room the lavatory stood and on it a large bottle of rubbing alcohol, almost full.

Thorne weighed the heavy bottle in his hand and decided it would make an excellent weapon. Clutching it he crouched behind the half-open door which furnished the only hiding place in the room.

In a few seconds he heard approaching footsteps. He heard Simms' voice shouting down the stairs and then the footsteps resumed. Thorne's breathing became so labored he thought Simms would surely hear it but the ex-rocketeer's mind was on other things and he entered the bathroom noticing nothing.

Simms walked to the tub and made sure it was filled. Behind him Thorne slid the door shut and turned the key.

At the click of the key Simms turned. Thorne saw that his face was less hard and much more dissipated looking.

Simms paled. "No!" he breathed. "It can't be . . . it can't . . ." He stood frozen against the tub, made impotent by horror. "You . . . you're dead . . . a ghost . . . !"

His voice was stilled by the heavy bottle which shattered against his skull. His body fell back into the tub where blood and alcohol mingled with the water and turned it crimson. . . .

Moyne punched the doorbell viciously. "Where's Simms?" he demanded of the butler who answered the bell. The man stared at Moyne's contorted features.

"Where's Simms, damn you!" the big man roared.

"Upstairs, sir. Taking his bath," the butler stammered.

Moyne pounded through the house and leaped up the stairs, taking two at a time. Behind him the help gathered to whisper and speculate excitedly.

The bathroom door was locked and Moyne yelled through it. "Phil! Phil! Open up . . . It's Jim! Open the door. . . ."

To his ears came the sound of splintering glass. Then silence.

"Phil!" The burly man backed up and then sent his shoulder crashing against the door. It splintered inward sending him into the center of the room.

"You! Moyne!" Thorne had the jagged edged neck of the bottle in his hand and he advanced on the big man. "So Dunn failed! Well, I won't!"

His first stroke slashed Moyne's arm and drew a spurt of blood but before Thorne could get in another blow the other had him by the arm, twisting it until the fingers loosened.

The burly rocketeer's free hand smashed into Thorne's throat and sent him screaming with pain and fear against the wall. Then Moyne had him by the throat, forcing him down and back over the edge of the tub. A glaze covered Thorne's eyes and a roaring mounted in his ears. There was a sharp crack . . .

And Moyne stared down at empty hands!

THE big man struggled to his feet, shaken. Dimly he heard feet pounding up the stairs and start down the hall toward the bathroom. For a moment Moyne continued to look, with almost unseeing eyes, at the body of his erstwhile partner in the crimsoned tub.

He felt someone behind him and turned. It was Mello!

"What do you want now, copper?"

"One of the maids just ran into the street screaming for help. I thought I'd better take a look." He shoved

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Moyne aside and his eyes narrowed at the gory sight in the tub.

"I didn't do it!" Moyne protested. "He was that way when I got here!"

The butler and the maid had followed Mello up and he now turned toward the door.

"Is that right?" he asked.

"No, sir!" the butler replied. "Mr. Simms had just gone in for his bath when Mr. Moyne came. Mr. Moyne seemed very disturbed about something and he ran up here shouting for Mr. Simms. Then we heard him pound at the door and after that there was a crash when he broke it down."

He paused. "That's when the maid ran out," he explained.

"Go on!" Mello urged.

"Then we heard an awful scream . . . and . . ."

"That wasn't Simms screaming," Moyne interrupted. "It was Thorne!" Mello glared at him. "And who is Thorne?" he wanted to know.

"I found him in here when I broke in," Moyne explained. "He'd just killed Phil and he tried to kill me!"

The detective was sarcastic. "And so what happened then?"

"We fought . . . and . . . he . . . disappeared . . ."

"Uh-huh. I suppose you ate him up. Or did he go through that locked window there?"

"No! You don't understand! He . . . he was right in my hands . . . and he disappeared!"

"That's what you said before. It doesn't sound any better now."

"Don't you believe me?"

"No! And I don't think the jury will."

Moyne stared at the gun which had appeared in the detective's hand and then at the body of Simms in the tub.

A sick feeling welled within him. He, too, knew they wouldn't.

THE END

RICHALM'S DEMONS

☆ By KAY BENNETT ☆

ABBOT RICHALM ruled over Cistercian monastery of Schonthal in the first part of the thirteenth century, and in a work which he called Revelations, he told how he was daily and hourly infested and tormented by devils, on whom he blamed all his physical ailments and his spiritual weaknesses. If he were sick in his stomach or had a head cold, the devils had to answer for it. If, when bending over, the blood rushed to his face, it was sent coursing through his veins by the devil. If he couldn't sleep all night but tossed about on his couch, it wasn't the fleas that kept him awake. For he said that fleas do not really bite, although they seem to, it is really the work of devils. If a monk snored, the noise did not come from him but from a demon lurking within his person. Holding such views on all bodily and mental disturbances, he naturally could not prescribe remedies which one would find in the corner drug store. He advised the use of holy water and the sign of the cross which was especially effective against flea-bites.

LIGHTNING STICKS

☆ By CAL WEBB ☆

LIGHTNING leaves its mark in a great many ways. It may slice a gash in a tree, knock off your chimney, or burn your buildings. But did you know that lightning sometimes leaves an exact imprint of itself in the form of crystallized lightning? A twenty-three foot length of lightning is displayed at the Rosenwald Geological Museum of the University of Chicago. It was found by Dr. George Monk, who was curious when he saw this hard, rope-like substance sticking out of the sand. They look like tubes of glass and extend down into the sand several feet, branching out in a tree-like formation. These tubes are caused by the lightning hitting the sand and melting and fusing the sand particles into long twisted tubes. The discovery of these tubes has changed our idea about the structure of lightning. Previously it was thought to be a series of jagged lines and sharp angles. But according to its "frozen" shape, it follows a perfectly smooth, curved shape.

* * *

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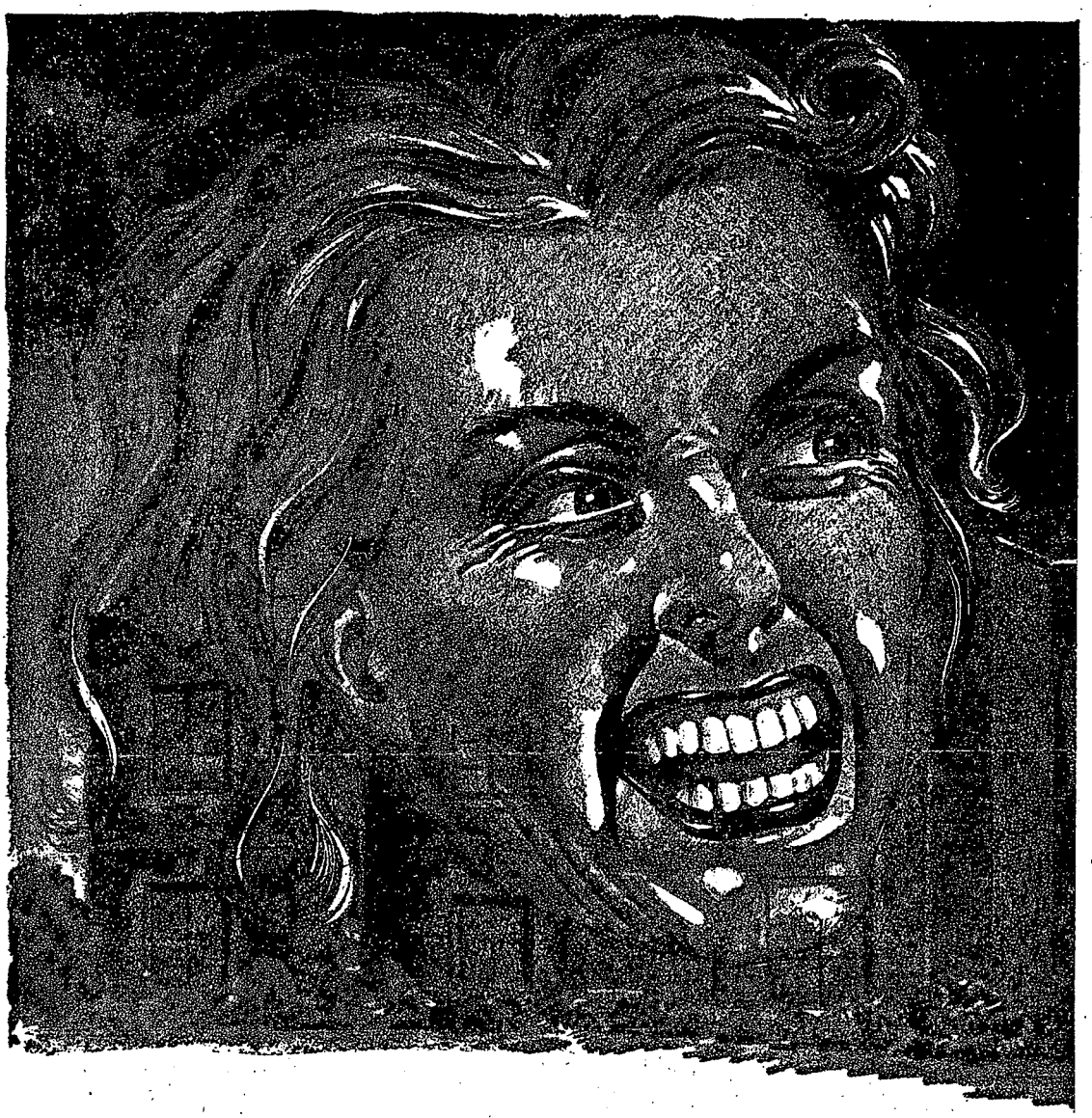

For some, it is said, there can be solace in death. . . . But what of those who once dead, find that they must die again?

I HAD some trouble getting my wallet back in my hip pocket. The zipper handle on it stuck to the corner of the lining, leaving the wallet dangling, half in half out. By the time I had untangled it and rose from the table the rest of the fellows were out of sight.

It was in the Old Heidelberg, the most exclusive restaurant in the block, which is about all I would say for exclusiveness in Chicago where *every*

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TWICE TO DIE

by ROG PHILLIPS

She stood on the lawn, her arms raised high, as if she were waiting for someone . . .

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hash house aims, but just misses, exclusiveness. The Old Heidelberg's bid for fame was its rule that every customer must wear a coat.

I had just moved to Chicago from the west coast. I'm a writer, and I wanted to be nearer the markets for my stories. So far, I had only found a place where I could stay for four weeks while a guy who couldn't afford to take a vacation and pay rent at the same time had sublet his apartment to me while he was gone.

Ye editor, two fellow craftsmen, and I had lunched at the Old Heidelburg. I hurried as quickly as good taste would permit to catch up with them before they got too far. I wasn't quite sure which way the office was from any place three blocks from it.

Then it happened. The entrance to the dining room is always crowded at lunch time with people who had not reserved a table in advance. They stand there and look at the empty tables with white and black reserved signs on them, growing more and more hungry, while the foresighted few straggle in and brush past them.

Hurrying, I started through the crowd at the door. Suddenly a vision of feminine clothing, hat, and motion appeared in front of me. Too late I put on the brakes.

As her body collided with mine, and a tide of subtly pleasant perfume brushed into my nostrils, I felt a tingling shock. Instinctively I put my hands on her shoulders to steady her. The flood of words that rushed to my lips, the apology I had intended to make for my clumsiness, stopped in my throat as her head raised and her eyes met mine.

I don't know how long I stood there, oblivious of the people that crowded against me on all sides, my hands resting on her shoulders, my eyes looking into those pools of enchanting magic half hidden by an ethereal veil of golden lashes, breathing the faint aura of a perfume that I was sure no store had ever sold over the counter, my brain paralyzed and my body tingling in every cell. Time stood still.

But when my senses did return with a rush and I took my hands away with a muttered apology and stepped aside to allow her to pass, I was vaguely aware that no one around us had noticed anything out of the ordinary.

Stepping out onto the sidewalk I hurried past the strolling crowds, catching up with my luncheon companions. The vision of that haunting smile, the magic of those clear, blue-green eyes, the intoxication of that faint perfume, sank themselves into my soul, to fill it with the memory of an experience like none other I had ever known, and to create an emptiness like none I had ever known. An emptiness that could only be filled in one way.

I half turned, debating whether I should go back and seize the opportunity while it was yet there. But I didn't. I went to the office and spent the afternoon kicking myself for not having done so.

To cover my state of mind I buried my face in a magazine, letting my eyes rest on the pages and my mind wander in speculation, again living the intoxicating experience and thrilling to the vibrant touch of those shoulders, the hypnotic ecstacy of those eyes.

"Hey, Jack," my reverie was shattered by the voice of Bill Fleming. "Here's a chance for you to get a place to stay. Some rich guy wants a gatekeeper."

"Let's see it," I growled, taking the paper from him and reading where he pointed.

The ad read, "Wanted, Gate keeper. Cottage furnished. Prefer elderly man on pension." The address was just off

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of North Shore Drive, in the section where every other house was over a century old, surrounded by a high stone fence, entrance to the grounds being made through ornamental iron gates set in the walls.

I had been out that way before and remembered some of them. I had even remarked about the gatekeeper's cottages being much nicer looking than some of the more modern homes in the newer sections.

THE possibilities struck me at once. A place to stay, in surroundings that would surely bring to mind numberless ideas for stories. The added advantage of no rent to pay. An occasional bell to answer would be the only drawback. Ha! I would work for nothing to get the job.

"Do you think I should go over to the costumers and get a white wig and beard, and maybe a cane, to apply for the job?" I asked Bill.

"I don't know," he answered. "Why don't you try it on the level. If that fails, THEN get the wig and cane."

"O.K.," I answered with a broad grin. "See you later."

The place was just as I had pictured it would be. In fact, I had a vague remembrance of having seen it before; perhaps a picture somewhere. I pulled my Buick to the curb near the driveway that led through the black iron latice work of the gates and curved through the trees to the side of the huge, stone mansion, about fifty yards back from the street.

A stone archway separated the gate of the foot path from the driveway gates. Set in the iron frame was a small push-button. I pressed it and whistled a tune while waiting for a response.

Five minutes later no one had showed up, so I tried the gate. It swung open at my touch.

The path swung away from the driveway and wound around a large flower bed, branching when it reached the house. I took the branch that led to the rear. Through the windows as I passed them the house seemed deserted. High ceilinged rooms, nicely furnished in old stuff that was in keeping with the exterior. Paintings on the walls. But not a soul in any of them.

I don't know why, but I had expected a cluttered back yard and a large back porch with a roof over it. Instead, the back of the house looked no different than the sides. The driveway on the other end of the back wall spread out to cover the entire front of a four-car garage generously, a narrow path leading from it in a straight line to join the one I stood on at the back door. And the door itself was an ordinary, weathered green, windowless one set into the stone wall of the house at almost ground level, a single concrete step setting it away from the sidewalk.

The large garage, set diagonally about thirty feet from the far corner of the house, only accentuated the bareness and monotony of the back lawn which stretched with perfect flatness to the rear wall of the grounds, a half dozen large, unkept trees rooted haphazardly in half dead, closely cropped lawn.

Once more I pressed a button, this time recessed in the wooden frame of the doorway. Inside I heard a single, melodious bong from a muted chim.

"The chime, at least, is twentieth century stuff," I thought. By now I felt too subdued by the immensity and atmosphere of lifelessness of the three-storied, mansford-roofed, stone building to whistle. And almost at once I heard movement inside. The sound of leather heels against wooden floor came nearer. It stopped for so long before the door swung open that I looked curi-

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ously about, expecting to see some sort of a peep hole through which a visitor could be spied upon unobserved from inside.

Then the door opened. A woman in her forties, dressed in a black uniform dress, a small square of white apron tied around her waist, looked up at me questioningly.

I pointed to the newspaper I held in my hand and said, "I've come about the ad for a gatekeeper. Is the position still open?"

"Just a minute, sir," the woman said. She started to close the door, then hesitated and said, "Won't you come inside, please?"

WITH a muttered "Thank you" I took off my hat and stepped through the doorway. It was a short, service hallway. I stood there uncomfortably while the maid went through the door at the end of the hall, closing it softly behind her, with the funereal quiet of an undertaker.

Almost immediately she returned, holding the door open and saying, "Won't you step this way, please?"

Her smile,—in fact her whole face and figure could only be described by one word, Expressionless.

I stepped past her onto a thick carpeted floor. The room was large, and across the room, seated in a high backed upholstered chair from some forgotten era, was a small, fragile looking, white haired lady. Her modern dress, whose replica I had seen in many store windows, seemed almost out of place.

She remained seated, a polite smile on her wrinkled face. I noted absently that she did have her power on smooth.

I inclined my head in a gesture of respect for the years of the lady and her house.

"You are calling about the position for someone else?" she asked curiously.

"No. For myself," I replied. "You see, there is such a housing shortage, and I am a writer. I could both fulfill the duties of gatekeeper and write my stories."

She frowned over this. I tried to look past her eyes and sense what she was thinking. There seemed almost an emptiness, as if the shell of the woman only was there and the spirit had departed some time years ago, unnoticed.

"Would you like to leave your address?" she asked suddenly. "If we decide to accept you we can get in touch with you."

With a feeling of relief I hastily wrote my phone number and address on a sheet out of my pocket note pad. I felt, or rather hoped, that this stall meant I wouldn't be hired.

The place seemed all right, but there was—well, something I could only sense vaguely, that didn't seem right. She accepted the proffered sheet of notepaper with an air of dismissal. I didn't need any more of a hint. Repeating my polite nod and accompanying it with a smile, I turned and left the way I had come. The maid was nowhere in sight as I walked down the back hall and stepped out onto the sidewalk once more. I retraced my steps to the front gate, glancing curiously at the gatekeeper's cottage on my way back to the car.

The cottage was nice appearing. A single story high, roof and walls seeming too massive for such a small building, but in keeping with the big house. I started over to look through a window, then shrugged my shoulders and went through the gate. I wasn't going to get the job, so why bother?

It was too late to go back to the office, so I went to the apartment and spent the evening pounding out a few more pages of my latest yarn. Before I went to bed I had forgotten the whole

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thing, storing it in some mental corner where I could drag it out and set it into a story sometime.

A week passed. During that week I ate lunch regularly at the Old Heidelburg, hoping I would run into my dream again, with no success. I even had dinner there. But no soap. She didn't show up.

Also I pounded out a couple of thoustand words a day, bowled a couple of evenings, and spent more and more time looking for a permanent place to stay. No luck there either. I could have found half a dozen sleeping rooms. But to take one would have been very expensive to a writer who needs a pleasant place to work and a reasonable amount of quiet during the day.

I HAD just about given up hope, and was thinking ruefully of the long trip back to the coast. Just about, but not quite. I would rent a sleeping room and look in other cities near Chicago before doing that.

Then the phone rang. Bill Flemming had called me up an hour previously. I hadn't had any "feelings" about that. There was no tangible reason why I should hesitate this time. The ring was no different. But I hesitated, a feeling of something causing me to hesitate. A feeling something like a hunch.

The voice on the other end of the phone was that of the old lady who had taken my number. I heard her ask for me, replied that I was Jack Marley, and heard her say that she had decided to accept my application.

Then I was caught up in a maze of details in which I didn't have time to do much thinking. I snapped out of it finally, relaxed in a somewhat moth-eaten armchair, firmly esconced in the gatekeeper's cottage, before a cheery fire I had built in the huge stone fireplace to clear out the dampness.

Even yet I can't remember all the details of moving. One minute I was hesitating about answering the phone. The next, with only a vague sense of passage of time and hurry of events, I was looking into the flames of the fire and trying to convince myself that I was not dreaming.

I hadn't seen the old lady. The maid had met me and given me the key to the cottage. I had been told I could park my car in the garage in the stall at the extreme right, and from then on I had been completely ignored.

The parting shot of the maid had been, "Breakfast for the servants is promptly at seven."

"Servant!" I had muttered to myself. "I'll bet I make more money than the Mawster." The memory of a cold hearted Chicago which had locked its doors on everyone not already "in" forced me to be a good boy, and I merely smiled, trying to show a non-existent gratitude.

It was after dark when I finally brought the last load of papers, typewriters, books, and manuscript copies and stuffed them away in closets so that I could unpack them later at my leisure. I had eaten my dinner on the way out with the last load, so after parking the car in its stall and glancing curiously around the garage, I had built the fire and relaxed.

The sky had been threatening all day. The radio had predicted a storm during the night. While I sat before the fireplace getting more and more drowsy, the windows occasionally lit up with the light of heat lightning. But when I finally stood up and crossed the room to the bedroom door, there still had been not a single drop of rain.

I DON'T know when I woke up. The thunder which awakened me was

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still crashing in the sky. It seemed directly overhead and very close, and during the moments when the prolonged blast of sound was momentarily stilled I could hear the downpour of rain as it beat against the roof and the ground outside.

I lay there and tossed about, unable to go back to sleep. Finally I arose and lit a cigarette. The French window I had opened for ventilation had blown shut, so I crossed the room to open it.

I pushed it open and leaned out, looking for some sign of a hook to keep it open. Lightning flashed across the sky through the trees, and the grounds were lit up so that every detail stood out in sharp clarity.

The rain was coming down in large drops that bounced as they hid the ground. The large house, its windows dark and mysterious, stood like a huge, immovable, timeless monument, squatting above the casket of some Titan who had lived in ages gone by.

But my eyes were arrested by something more. Standing in the rain, her arms upraised as if in supplication, was a girl. Her face was raised into the rain. She stood in profile, her long, sheer white dress molding her figure in revealing detail, the wind whipping it out into waving streamers behind.

The vision beat into my brain with sharp vividness, and then was gone as the sky ceased its unloosing of titanic electric force and became dark.

I couldn't think. My eyes bored through the night, trying by sheer force of will to pierce the rain-drenched darkness. And the shock, the terrible shock of seeing the girl in the rain, drenched undoubtedly to the skin, in attire which no one in their right mind would wear IF THEY WERE AWAKE, was a minor thing compared to the realization that it was the girl I had met in the Old Heidelberg!

Suddenly I turned and stumbled through the darkness of the room toward the door. My frantic haste made me clumsy and I cursed silently as I stumbled against a chair. There was no time to remember where the light switches were.

I burst into the living room. The still burning fire on the hearth sent feeble, but adequate rays of light through the room.

In bare feet, clad only in broadcloth pajamas, I flung open the door and dashed into the rain, running down the path in the general direction of the girl. Lightning cascaded across the sky constantly, revealing the girl to still be there, her figure as revealed by the flashes, appearing like an image in the old flicker movies. And overhead the thunder beat a mad, unworldy rhythm of sound. It dominated the pounding of my heart, the harsh panting of my breath, and the beat of my feet against the rain-drenched path.

As I neared her she seemed to sense my presence, half turning toward me, a pale smile on her lips. I put my arm around her slim waist and picked her up. Her arms went around my shoulders and her eyes sought mine as the thunder and the lightning beat a deafening, blinding crescendo.

My lips met hers crushingly, and my soul tottered on the brink of the Abyss, flayed by the pounding of the storm, shaken by the ecstasy of that kiss, drunk with a madness of emotion so strong, so overpowering and intense, that the very pain of it was ecstatic, overpowering pleasure.

Then sanity returned. My lips broke away from hers. The intermittent light showed the whiteness of her slim, lovely form was bluish from exposure. I felt her trembling.

I turned and stumbled back toward the cottage. In the darkness her lips

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again sought mine, feverishly. I was lost in indescribable madness, my mind whirling feverishly in the passion of her lips, my feet moving unsteadily forward.

With no warning blackness enveloped me.

MY EYES opened slowly. I was in the living room of the cottage. The fire in the fireplace was burning brightly and standing before it, his back turned to me, was a man. His dark suit coat fitted tightly over the heavily muscled shoulders. The light grey, pin-stripe trousers hung gracefully from slim hips, their unspoiled creases dropping to the tops of brown shoes.

The closely cropped black head hinted at a high forehead, and the small ears hugged the side of the head closely.

My eyes darted around the room. No one else was there. I glanced down. I was in the chair I had occupied earlier in the evening. Under my bathrobe was a fresh pair of broadcloth pajamas. My skin felt warm and dry. And on my feet were my blue leather bedroom slippers.

There was a dull throbbing at the back of my head. I reached up with my hand and explored carefully. My hair was dry, but mussed, with the soft, clean feel to it that hair has after being washed and dried. In back was a very tender spot, slightly swollen.

I fished a cigarette out of the pack in my bathrobe pocket and a book of matches. The scratching of the match, or perhaps the light it made, caused the man to turn around. My hand shook violently as I tried to light the cigarette. It went out.

"Here, let me light it for you," the man said, coming forward, a look of concern on his face. He took the match folder from my unresisting fingers and bent over, and as I sucked deeply on the cigarette I noticed that his fingers were perfectly steady.

His clear brown eyes were calm. A shade of concern and pity blended into the habitual intellectual mold of his face. His forehead was high, his nose thin and finely formed. His chin just missed being square. There were power and breeding in his features, a self-assurance that is seldom found in any but foreigners.

The cut of his coat and the way he bore himself hinted at central Europe more than Chicago. And there had been just a shade of an accent in his rich baritone voice when he had spoken.

Suddenly the memory of the girl came back. It swept over me in a rushing tide, and the cigarette which I had been holding in my hand seared into the flesh as the emotion accompanying the return of memory constricted my fingers involuntarily.

An exclamation of pain escaped from my lips and I rubbed the hot coals from my palm onto my bathrobe, swearing fervently under my breath. But the pain cleared my brain of its cobwebs.

"Who *are* you?" I asked, half angrily.

"My name is Doctor Henry Blech," he said, pronouncing the ch with the prolonged German soft k sound. "I'll tell you a little about me if you care to listen."

"O.K.," I snapped. I pulled out another cigarette and this time I lit it successfully.

"I am a psychiatrist," Dr. Blech began. "Years ago I practiced in Vienna. I gained somewhat of a reputation." He shrugged his shoulders desparagingly. 'The reputation spread to America. Perhaps some book I wrote had a little to do with that. I don't know.

"At any rate, in nineteen thirty-five

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I received an invitation to come to the United States in a consultive capacity on a certain case. A fellow practitioner of mine here in Chicago had something he considered unique in the history of psychiatry. He sent me the case history. I found that if his notes were accurate it was indeed something unique. So I dropped my practice temporarily and came.

"That was eleven years ago, and I am still here as you can see." He pulled out a slim cigarette case and lit a long, unusually slim cigarette.

WHILE he was doing that I was remembering that girl. I had been dimly conscious, even in my madness, that something was wrong. What was it? The expression on her face? Her being in the storm in such flimsy costume? The way her lips sought mine, and me a stranger who had suddenly loomed up in the night? All these things definitely pointed to insanity.

And yet, her eyes as I had looked in them that afternoon in the Old Heidelberg, had been sane. Completely sane and normal, in spite of the electrifying effect they had had on me.

And there was an underlying difference in the effect she had had on me then, and the effect she had had on me as she lay limp and unresisting in my arms, the storm beating against us. The storm that still raged outside.

I had sensed it subconsciously, but had been so overcome with madness and the single desire to get her in out of the storm and get help for her that I had not stopped to analyze those feelings then.

Now I was doing so. And suddenly the logical solution flashed into my mind.

"They are twins!" I exclaimed in triumph.

"Yes," and a look of startled surprise appeared on Dr. Blech's face. "But how did you know? You have more knowledge of the case than your—er, experience of an hour ago?"

Briefly I told him of meeting the girl at the Old Heidelberg. I explained my surprise at seeing what I thought to be the same girl as I looked at the raging storm from my bedroom window, and how I had gone to her rescue, dimly sensing she was not right, and losing myself in madness as she rested in my arms, her face so near.

"I didn't know then that it wasn't the same girl, but her twin," I concluded.

Dr. Blech had listened, a thoughtful, attentive expression on his face. After I ceased talking he seemed to be studying what I had said. Finally he spoke.

"You love this girl you met in the restaurant?" he asked.

"Yes!" I said defiantly. "Oh, I know it sounds screwy, to meet a girl only once, and then for only an instant. And to be so certain you are in love with her. But I'm certain. And I'm equally certain that she had the same feeling."

"Then let me tell you this," the doctor said. His whole demeanor had changed. His sensitive nostrils were flaring and his dark eyes held a fire of smoldering anger. "They are twins, BUT THEY HAVE ONLY ONE BODY!"

The shock of his words paralyzed me. I watched dumbly as he turned his broad back to me, trying visibly to control his emotions. Finally he turned again.

"I'll tell you the whole story," he resumed in a quieter voice. "You met Mrs. Andrews? Of course you did. She is the old lady whom you saw when you applied for the position of gate-keeper. She is the mother of the twins.

"She was fifty-three when they were

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born. That is unusual enough in itself. But to have twins at that age is even more rare. They were both girls, but one of them had died when in the partially completed stage of development that is arrived at when the embryo is about seven months old.

"The two embryos had developed so closely intertwined that in the month they had lain together while one of them was dead, the substance of the dead one had been partially absorbed into the living, and partly into the body of the mother herself.

"IT WILL remain a medical mystery how the living child survived in the presence of the toxic products of decay of the dead for so long. The mother herself was so far gone that for a long time the doctors in attendance had little hope of saving her life.

"But the child seemed healthy and normal, and even to have an unusual vitality and alertness. Or so the charts in the files of the attending physician lead us to believe.

"Nothing abnormal about the child was noticed for many years. When abnormality *did* develop, the parents and the nurse, whom you have also met, I believe, recalled that the girl had always, even as a baby, had 'spells' when she was utterly different.

"There seemed to be two distinct personalities developing in the child. At first both were entirely normal. That is assumed because the real trouble did not begin until the child had almost reached womanhood. And by then both personalities were developed and completely distinct.

"But then a struggle began. I believe that as the realization dawned upon each that love, marriage, and child-bearing were just around the corner, so to speak, each determined to have the body to herself exclusively.

"Up until that period in life, each had been mainly concerned with intellectual pursuits, and each had tolerated the presence of the other because there was no real disadvantage to either in their sharing in the occupation of their physical body.

"As is always the case in any struggle, one of the two personalities or spirits was stronger than the other. I believe she was stronger because SHE REALIZED IT WAS NOT RIGHTFULLY HER BODY. In short, she was the soul of the dead twin, and had gone into the body of her living sister as they lay together in the womb of their mother!"

The doctor paused in his story, tossing the stub of his cigarette into the fireplace with a vicious flick of his fingers. He continued.

"Gradually the rightful owner of the body weakened, her reason slowly slipped away, she began to break under the constant attacks of her sister. Her periods of dominancy became shorter and shorter.

"The parents could not understand what was going on, of course. When their daughter began to have fits of weeping and abnormalcy they consulted the leading psychiatrist in Chicago. He studied the case for several months, even having the girl in his sanitarium for a few months under close observation.

"Finally he pieced together the bits of the puzzle. He realized it was beyond his ability to effect a cure. He advised the parents to secure the services of the most outstanding psychiatrist in the world, warning them that even then, in his opinion, there was little hope.

"I was called. For two years I tried every conceivable way to effect the release of the usurper from the body of the child without success. The case became an obsession with me. I sold

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my practice in Vienna.

"At first I set up a practice in Chicago, and kept an office there. Then finally I gave even that up. With the consent of the parents I moved into the house, and I have been here since then, devoting what little skill I have to the problem."

The doctor's shoulders sagged in dejection. "If I had been called while the girl was still in posession of her reason I might have succeeded. If the girl had learned to love me as I—" He stopped abruptly.

"You love this girl?" I asked.

"Yes." He nodded his head sadly. "Why do you think I gave up my practice? My future?"

HIS face became stern. "Yes, I love her. And equally I hate the soul of her sister; the sister whose dead body lay twined about her while the spirit and poisons from its decaying flesh tainted the living."

Dr. Blech stood stiffly, his fists clenched, his dark, foreign face grimly fixed in lines of hate. Numbly my mind compared the flash of angry light in his eyes with the sharp, sudden glare of lightning which lit up the window at his back to the right of the fireplace.

The century old cottage with its thick, stone walls, the leaded glass windows, the massive fireplace, and the raging storm that beat against us from outside, held back as many other storms had been held in the past hundred and fifty years, were a fitting setting for the unfoldment of his tale.

As I sat there watching him, my head throbbing violently, a cigarette dangling from my nerveless lips, I would not have been surprised if his form had suddenly become indistinct, its lines changing in a blur of flowing motion, and he had dropped to all fours, a werewolf.

And slowly the meaning of what he had said began to penetrate. The girl I loved, the girl whose touch had sent electric, magic life and hope into my soul, was an upstart! An obsessing spirit! Slowly, with cold deliberation, she was driving her twin insane, trying to drive her from the body which was rightfully hers.

The memory of the other,—that helpless, sick girl in the rain whose lips had sought mine, taking what happiness she could while she had the chance; and the memory of those eyes as they held mine in magic embrace in the Old Heidelberg, while the spirit in them whispered, "I love you," fought in my memory.

"No!" I exclaimed aloud. My cry seemed a thing separate from me. I heard the anguish, the protest in it. "You're wrong!"

"Unfortunately I am right," the doctor said quietly.

I started to speak. He held up his hand to stop my rush of words and went on.

"You see," he said, "neither girl is aware of the existence of the other! Just as you, and every person, has a censor which blocks off from the conscious mind all thoughts which it could not accept, and sometimes brings them through in symbological form by means of dreams, so each of these personalities, from earliest infancy onward, has built up a censor which automatically rationalizes the inconsistencies that inevitably develop each day.

"Unlike most cases of split personality, both personalities have the same name. Both are Carolyn Andrews. Both are the only child of the Andrews. Where their memories are consistent and their desires coincide, they may be said to be one person. Where their interests and hopes clash, they are separate.

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"The Carolyn you saw at the Old Heidelberg is a wonderful girl. She does not know that in her subconscious she is deliberately plotting the overthrow and eviction of her sister from the body she herself has no right to. If she could be told the truth she would be horrified and perhaps not believe it. For reasons I'll explain later, you must meet her and get acquainted with her. For the same reasons you must meet her sister under,—ah, more favorable circumstances than those of tonight."

DOCTOR BLECH glanced at his wristwatch. Outside the storm was abating, and the dim light of dawn was perceptible through the windows.

"Right now we both need some rest," he concluded. "This afternoon would be a good time for you to meet the girl of the Old Heidelberg formally. When you do, let nothing of all this pass your lips. Later I want to talk to you privately again. And in a few days I will convince you of the truth of all my assertions that seem so incredible now. Good night." With that he left.

I stood up and went to the window and gazed at the back of the doctor as he went along the path to the house. Was he right? He gave the impression of being a trifle abnormal himself. I realized I would have to discount this impression, because all foreigners seem a trifle abnormal. Especially so if they are Europeans who dabble in psychoanalysis and the occult.

But he confessed a love for one of the personalities resident in the girl whose name I now knew to be Carolyn Andrews. Carolyn! I had often wondered what the name would be that I would someday associate the answers to all my dreams with. And now that my dreams were being answered they were turning out to be nightmares.

I thought of my first attraction for this place. The hope that a lot of good ideas would come from living here that would result in stories. Stories! My livelihood. My source of income.

Suddenly the game of hatching plots and building them into interesting tales for public consumption seemed silly; the game of adolescent minds that had never experienced anything real, written for the escape of stupid, dull readers from their own uninteresting lives.

Here, and within the walls of that sinister heap of masonry which had just swallowed the doctor, was realism; the goal of all authors—a goal that can only be attained by reality. And I was part of it. I, a dealer in cellophane wrappers in assorted tints, in which the public could wrap itself and imagine itself in a universe apart from reality; I, a seller of prosaic pipe dreams designed to lift the tired city dweller out of his cockroach infested sleeping room and transport him to the future, to other worlds, or to the adventure laden past; I, had been sold a bill of goods that was genuine!

IT WAS midafternoon when the wall phone rang and the careful, European voice of Dr. Blech announced that my presence was requested in the drawing room of the house. His voice over the phone carried no hint of anything out of the ordinary.

I had been ready for this call for hours. Putting my Bing Crosby jacket on over my sport shirt and making sure the collar of the shirt was outside the coat where it belonged, I left the cottage and strolled casually up the path to the front door of the big stone mansion.

The doctor met me there and conducted me through a large front room, and through a massive, cream-enameled door into a room whose outer wall was

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taken up mostly by French doors opening onto a terrace. I had missed it before because it was on the driveway side of the house. A Hammond organ was setting in a central position, placed so that whoever played it could look out through the French doors at a somewhat uninspiring landscape of roses, Canas, and bushes, surrounded by more of the flat, half dead lawn that I firmly believed to be as old as the house itself.

Mrs. Andrews was seated stiffly erect on a backless walnut seat. Standing near her was Carolyn. *My* Carolyn, as I now referred to her in my thoughts.

She was dressed as she had been at the Old Heidelberg, minus the hat. Her blond hair showed no signs of the soaking it had had the night before, and was done up in the casual way some girls can affect and make it look like it had just come from the beauty shop.

As I came through the door her expression was that of idle curiosity blended with interest. I guessed she had been told the new gatekeeper was a young man who wrote stories for a living and had applied for the job because of the housing shortage. At least the look on her face seemed to indicate that.

Then she recognized me. I saw the startled look come into her eyes, and sensed the wheels start to go around in her pretty head. A slow flush crept up from her neck and spread over her face.

Suddenly I knew what she was thinking. She thought that I had in some way known who she was and had taken the job in order to meet her!

"Carolyn, this is Jack Marley," Dr. Blech had said. She seemed not to have heard. Anger at the daring she thought I had had in taking a job just to meet her, undisguised pleasure at the knowledge I had, embarrassment, forgiveness for my supposed daring, pleasure again, and embarrassment again, rushed to her face in rapid succession.

Then she woke up to the fact that Dr. Blech had said something, did a rapid double take and landed gracefully on her feet, mentally—the casual, well bred young lady meeting a social freak.

"How do you do, Mr.—, I don't believe I quite got the name?". It was the first I had heard her voice. I liked the way her lips moved when she talked, and there was a resonant quality to her voice that goes vaguely by the name dusky.

"Jack Marley," Dr. Blech repeated.

She held out her hand, an impish smile on her lips. Remembering the shock of touching her in the restaurant I hesitated. Then I put mine in hers. It was cool and pleasant. I left it there as long as I dared, drinking the heady draft of her blue-green, twinkling eyes. She had recovered her sense of humor and I matched her mood with relief. There would be time enough later to convince her that I had not known she lived here when I took the job. Or should I tell her?

I don't know what we talked about. Somehow without being aware of saying anything, we found out that we both enjoyed swimming, that she had read something of mine under a pen name and thought it wonderful, that the electric organ was hers and that she played it quite well.

Then we discovered that we were alone.

"How rude of mother and Henry to leave without being excused," Carolyn exclaimed merrily to cover her embarrassment at the realization that she had betrayed her interest in me so easily.

I didn't want to come out of the clouds, so I suggested something on the organ. She played several things I didn't know, but which were really something. I suggested that I could play a little, more to get a chance to sit

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beside her than to exhibit my skill or lack of it.

I sat down and played a few tunes by ear, switched to Rachmaninoff, my only serious achievement, and then we wound up in a dual with Chopsticks.

I don't know how it happened. We were laughingly slaughtering Chopsticks when our hands got tangled up. Suddenly I was holding hers and we were close together. She looked up at me, a dreamy, half-frightened look in her eyes. Then slowly I kissed her.

With her lips against mine and the ancient walls benignly looking on, I thought, "If I lose you after having found you life won't be worth living."

THEN she drew away from me and sat leaning back slightly, a half wondering amazement in her eyes. I knew there was a smile on my lips. But that's all I really knew.

Then I held out my arms and she came into them. I sensed the relief with which she accepted the fact of loving me. By some strange alchemy of love the mystery and problems that were walled up in her subconscious became mine. And I KNEW that here was no upstart obsessor. I KNEW the doctor was wrong.

Finally Carolyn raised her head from where it had lain on my shoulder. There was a shyness in the look she gave me. Unconsciously her hand raised to straighten out her hair and she gave an embarrassed chuckle.

"Well, what do we do now?" she asked.

I took her face in my hands and gave her a tender kiss, and said, "We act very prosaic and pretend we just like each other in a polite way so as to convince the doctor and your mother that we think we are fooling them, when they have undoubtedly been peeking through the keyhole for the last half hour—and know what has been going on whether they have been peeking or not."

This appealed to her, so we strode casually into the other room, her fingers twined in mine, and we both strived with only a little success to attain the appearance of careless friendliness, enjoying the transparent fraud of our little game.

Carolyn's mother and Dr. Blech, pretending to be quite interested in something in the newspaper, co-operated quite well with us in our mutual deception.

I watched the doctor curiously, trying to detect signs of jealousy. Although the Carolyn I loved, and who loved me, was not the one *he* loved, the lips I had kissed, the living, vibrant body I had held in my arms, were those that he, too, longed to hold.

Perhaps he had already, when the other Carolyn was dominant. The jealousy I had looked for in him suddenly welled up in me. And with it a knowledge that come what may, I would fight to the last ditch, and by any means, fair or foul, to get rid of the other Carolyn and take *my* Carolyn away from this place.

While all this was going on in the back of my mind, the four of us were making serious attemps to carry on a casual, friendly conversation. Now I threw myself into it with a will, and was soon my ordinary self.

The conversation got around to story writing. The inevitable question, "Where do you get your ideas?" came from Carolyn herself.

"It's like an equation in mathematics," I said. I had gone over all this many, many times, so did not have to think too much of what I was saying.

"You have a perfectly ordinary series of events in real life. It's like a single specific solution to mathematical equation. Let all the answers become

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variables. Let some of them vary one way, others vary another. The result is something that *might* take place in real life, but somehow never does. Therefore it becomes interesting fiction.

"For example," I warmed up to my subject. "You hear of people having nervous breakdowns over troubles, and even going nuts in the face of some insoluble dilemma. You have scientists spending their lives trying to unravel the mysteries of the past of the human race. You hear of hair turning white overnight because of some trying event. You read of Freud and his psychoanalysis restoring the sanity of people by finding out what drove them insane. You see, in your mind's eye, the friends and relatives of these insane people taking them to the psychiatrist so that he can find the clue to their madness.

"Put them all into a variable setup. Let some pepole go mad. Let the mystery be, not in their mental makeup, but hidden in a series of events. This series of events will make up the body of the story when it is written. Cut out the psychiatrist and let the reader take his place. Let the writer be the friend who is taking the case to the reader, with his friends the innocent victims. What have you really got?

"You have a mystery hidden in a perfectly ordinary, or maybe not so ordinary, series of events. The mystery is penetrated by your friends, who promptly go mad. Push that to the extreme and have them become mindless creatures who can't take care of themselves. You, the writer, are taking the case before the reader because you can't solve the mystery yourself. If the reader, after reading what happened can penetrate the mystery and doesn't himself go mad, maybe he can supply the clue to the restoring of your friends to their normal state."

CAROLYN and her mother laughed delightedly at the picture I had built up. Dr. Blech chuckled politely, but the frown on his face indicated that he was wondering where I was headed.

"Now," I went on, "you have the framework of a fascinating story. All you have to do is conjure up a series of events that will fit into the framework without letting the reader down in his expectations after reading the buildup. I actually wrote such a story. I made the mystery be some mysterious entity which I left as either the mass consciousness of humanity or as some last man, alone on the planet in the future after the rest of the race has died out, probing into the past in an effort to change what happened. In the background I built up the mystery quite definitely, but never brought it all out, because the mystery the way it stood offered the reader a chance to solve it. No doubt when it is printed someone might *really* solve something and actually go mad. Then I'll become a second Orson Welles!"

Now even the doctor laughed. I wasn't through with the subject yet, but I didn't know whether I dared go on. I decided to risk it.

"The series of events in the story I wrote was designed for a specific public; the readers of a fantasy magazine. But the same skeleton could have any number of 'series of events' as its foundation. Instead of suddenly going mad, the victims could spend years at it, while they lived in the midst of the mystery, unable to solve it. They might even think they have solved it and not be able to do anything to end it. They might not know they have *gone* mad. They might be mistaken in their solution to the mystery."

"You see," I concluded, "With that one plot a thousand stories can be

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written. You can have one, four, or any number of people go mad, in any number of ways. You can have a hero solve the mystery, you can leave it for the reader, you can set the story in a scientific laboratory, a home, on a ship at sea, on an island, or even in the African jungle."

"Do all your stories follow this plot?" Mrs. Andrews asked.

"No. Heaven forbid!" I exclaimed. "Writers who stick to one plot become monotonous. They might keep the same characters as is done in lots of the most popular detective fiction, but the plots must vary. Otherwise the writer's reading public soon shies away from him."

The big double doors on one side of the room emitted rattling noises, then opened wide, pushed from the other side by a tall, English looking butler.

Dinner was obviously ready. I arose in haste, ready to make hasty excuses and leave. I had suddenly remembered that I was only the gatekeeper, and that I was supposed to eat with the servants.

Mrs. Andrews read my mind and said, "You will have dinner with us, of course, Mr. Marley. And now that we know you, you may forget all about being gatekeeper. Goodness knows we never have need of one. I think I keep one on only because I hate to have the cottage unoccupied." She laughed gayly. "After hearing how you write a story I could never regard you as one of my servants again."

"Thank you," I said. Carolyn took my hand and led me into the dining room.

DURING dinner I thought it was the most enjoyable meal I had ever had. Carolyn sat across from me, and we carried on a conversation with our eyes that was just between us, while at the same time keeping up our end of the general conversation.

The doctor had become quite human. I began to like him.

Toward the end of the meal I noticed that Carolyn began to look a little tired. Then, when we finally rose from the table, she said, "I feel awfully like a baby, Jack, but will you excuse me. I feel too sleepy to remain awake. Perhaps after a little nap I'll feel better."

"Of course," I said hastily.

"Of course," the doctor echoed. "If you do not wake up in time to see him again this evening he will be here tomorrow."

"That's right," she smiled. She looked back and gave me a parting, tender smile as she went through the door. After she had gone I thanked Mrs. Andrews for the dinner and started to excuse myself.

"Wait," the doctor said. "In a few moments you will meet the other Carolyn. When you have been here longer you will learn to recognize the symptoms of transition."

Mrs. Andrews smiled sadly and said nothing. We were in the front room now, so I sat down on one of the high backed antiques and said nothing. Dr. Blech picked up the evening paper and looked at it without reading anything. Mrs. Andrews just sat there. I doubt if she was even thinking.

I could understand her better now. The blankness of mind that I had sensed in her at our first meeting I saw now to be a wall of reserve. In what I considered to be the evening of life, at fifty-three, when most people have all their big events behind them and look forward to a life of relaxation and uneventful years, she had suddenly been visited by tragedy and had had to live with it since.

She had walled in her feelings, culti-

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vated a calm exterior for so long that it had become an automatic mask, impenetrable to the casual onlooker.

She noticed I was studying her and gave me a friendly smile. I returned it.

The door opened and Carolyn returned. She didn't seem to notice me at first, coming in with an air of careless let down, not bothering to notice anyone in the room.

"I feel so listless," she said in a petulant voice. "I always feel so let down after a storm."

Her roving eyes settled on me. "Oh, hello," she exclaimed. "Aren't you the young man who rescued me from myself in the rain last night? It was so nice of you to do that. And it was so mean of the doctor to hit you over the head." She tittered, putting her hand over her mouth.

I looked sharply at the doctor. He looked embarrassed and said lamely, "I didn't know quite what to do. I did the first thing that came to mind."

"He is so funny," the new Carolyn said. "He is foreign, you know. And he's in love with me. I think it was jealousy that made him hit you over the head. He picked me up and carried me back to the house and left you laying there in the rain. And in your pajamas, too." She laughed gleefully. Then concern appeared on her face. "I hope you didn't catch cold. Did you? But I didn't kiss Henry when he carried me to the house," she went on without waiting for an answer to her question. "His kisses are so tragic. I suppose that is his idea of emotion. But *your* kisses are terrific. They are so alive. And it was so thrilling to have you appear out of the storm and sweep me off my feet in such a stormy fashion. I never had that happen before in my life. You know, I think someone told me you are the new gatekeeper. Won't you tell me about yourself? But I suppose you are married and your wife is here with you. That is the way it always is.

"Oh, you aren't!" she exclaimed. "Oh, that's *so* nice."

I HAD listened to this verbal tirade with increasingly mixed up feelings. A horrible, sickening feeling was growing in the pit of my stomach, and I could feel the food that I had eaten with such pleasure knot up in my stomach.

I looked at the doctor helplessly. He looked his encouragement, but it didn't help. Then he tried to put things on a more conventional basis.

"This is Jack Marley, the new gatekeeper," he said. "He writes stories and took the position because of the housing shortage."

"Oh, how simply romantic," she exclaimed, holding out her hand. I took it. It was still cool to the touch. As I held it there, imprisoned against its will this time, a thousand thoughts rushed into my brain. A plea for help, for understanding, for trust and confidence, seemed to flow secretly from the hand into my brain, from the sleeping Carolyn whose subconscious knew what was going on.

The Carolyn of the storm asked breathlessly for me to tell her about story writing. Reluctantly I repeated much of what I had said earlier, each word seeming to become desecrated as it left my lips for the ears of this mad, prattling creature that looked out of Carolyn's eyes.

I wanted to excuse myself and rush out of the house and walk and walk and walk, until the exertion had erased the the taint of this experience from my mind. I wanted to, but I dared do nothing except sit there and be nice, because I could not know what harm I might do by any other course.

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I wanted to switch the subject but my brain was too numb to make the effort. It was a welcome relief when her shallow mind lost interest in my account and seized on a new train of thought of her own.

I had been telling mechanically of the build-up of a plot. She broke in.

"That's so interesting. I was in a hospital once. Mother has always been ill and had to have a doctor. That is why Henry lives here. He's a doctor, you know. Mother was very ill so the doctor we had before Henry took me out to his sanitarium to stay for a few months. It was so interesting."

She broke off and went to the window. It had grown dark outside. The storm of the night before had gone, and most of the rain had now soaked into the ground. She turned and looked pleadingly into my eyes.

"The night is so beautiful. I always love it. Would you like to walk with me on the grounds? It is *so* beautiful out there."

I looked appealingly at Dr. Blech. He nodded sternly. It was a command. I saw the hurt in his eyes. The grim self-control. In that moment I pitied him more than I did this frail, senseless spirit that dwelt in Carolyn. I saw the life he was wasting. His own life, so full of promise eleven years ago when he was a world-renowned psychiatrist.

I completed in my mind the plot I had hinted at in my conversation. The two Carolyns were the series of events. The century and a half old mansion with its chold stone walls was the setting. And the one slowly going mad because he could not resolve the mystery was the doctor. Perhaps Mrs. Andrews was already mad. Perhaps her cloak of conventional niceties hid a mind that had lost its reason long ago. Perhaps my feeling about her the first time I saw her was correct. Perhaps her spirit *had* departed, years ago, unnoticed.

It wasn't a mystery for the reader to thrill over and try to solve, and go mad himself so that I could become a second Orson Welles. It was a mystery that might very well leave *me* a mindless creature, but of which I was now an integral part. I would have to resolve it or go mad myself.

But what could *I* do? A writer with a casual knowledge of many subjects, but master of none? Could I be right when a world-renowned expert was sure *he* was right? And if he *was* right, assuming that he could eventually drive one of these two Carolyns away forever, would it be right to banish the sane, lovable Carolyn,—*my* Carolyn, into the darkness of disembodiment or oblivion so that this witless, prattling—creature, that was now making my ears crawl with her senseless conversation, could remain permanently?

MY MIND was jerked back to my surroundings as Carolyn took my arm and firmly directed me toward the door. We were out, wandering along the border of the flower beds. Vaguely I was aware that her voice had become quiet and intimate.

It kept on without interruption. It asked questions without waiting for an answer. It switched without warning from one subject to another, often doing so in the middle of a word even, leaving the old subject dangling.

She walked close to me, her hair brushing my shoulder. The spell of the night before returned. The realization that this was the body of *my* Carolyn was strong in my mind. By blotting out the endless prattle, consigning it to the gloom that softly hid the dying lawn, making it no different than a young, green carpet of tender

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shoots under my feet; by imagining that it was really *my* Carolyn's hair that the gentle breeze tossed playfully against my neck, I could almost imagine the rest to be a nightmare of my professional imagination, and that it didn't really exist.

We had stopped under a tree. Her voice had become a soothing, meaningless, hypnotic sound. Then she was against me, yielding, feminine, and my arms went around her.

Her face lifted, a white oval in the dark, with its blue-green eyes beckoning. Her lips found mine, hungrily. The madness of the storm returned. In my mind the thunders crashed and the lightnings flashed across the sky. I felt the beat of her heart against mine, the quickness of her breath, the trembling of her body.

Then a nausea and an overwhelming disgust hit me. I crushed her angrily and then released her. She fell, sobbing, to lay at my feet.

I looked at her huddled figure silently for a moment, sick with indecision and self-disgust. Then I turned and went to my cottage. As I went I was aware of the figure of the doctor as it left the shadow of a tree and went toward the pitiful creature I had left.

I knew what I was going to do. My mind was made up. I went to the bedroom and started throwing sox, shirts, and things in my suitcase. I started putting books back in the boxes I had taken them out of that morning.

In my heart I knew that my love for the *real* Carolyn would bring me back. But I was going. Things broke as I slammed them into boxes. I cursed monotonously as things resisted my efforts to put them away in their packing cases.

I stood up and lit a cigarette with trembling fingers. The doctor was standing quietly in the doorway.

Glaring at him, I returned to my work of packing. He said nothing.

"You are quitting?" he asked finally. There was a carefulness in his voice like the carefulness with which you talk to a crazed killer with a gun, or like the carefulness with which you handle a rattlesnake.

Through some quirk of male psychology this flattered me. My anger abated. I grew angry at the weakening of my anger.

"Yes," I said. "I'm getting out of this madhouse. *You* are insane yourself, doctor. Do you know that? Giving up a practice and a life dedicated to society to lose yourself in a hopeless love for a mad, obsessing spirit. *I'm* not going to do the same. I'm getting out while there is still time. If I don't I'll never be able to write another story again."

"DO YOU think you can leave all this just by going?" Dr. Blech asked in the same careful voice. "I have studied you carefully. I don't think you can forget your love for the other Carolyn or her love for you. That love that made you hurt *my* Carolyn. That love has kept *me* here, and driven me insane, as you say."

His voice became tragically bitter. "I couldn't leave if I tried. I have tried, without success.

"Do you think I am going to *let* you leave?" he continued, his voice taking on an angry, desperate note. "I've waited at least eight years for you to come. I'm not going to let you go now."

"What do you mean?" I asked, bewildered.

"I mean simply this," he answered. "I am going to prove to you that the girl you crushed and left lying on the lawn is the rightful possessor of that body. I'm going to convince you that you have it in your power to give that

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body to her and her alone, ending this tragedy. It will hurt. I know how it will hurt you. Haven't I suffered myself as much as any human can suffer?"

"Just how are you going to prove all this?" I asked belligerently.

"When I carried Carolyn into the house I put her into a state of hypnotic trance to wipe out the effects of your stupid actions. She is still in that state. Come with me and I'll prove what I say."

I followed the doctor, wonderingly. He continued his explanation as we went to the house.

"In the hypnotic state the subconscious mind of each personality can be called up and questioned," he said in a hushed voice. "By questioning it we can establish its identity as belonging to one or the other of the personalities. Then we can ask it anything we wish and it will answer, because it is subject completely to my will after I have hypnotized the patient."

He was now the doctor, sure and confident of himself. I quickened my steps. He led me upstairs and into a room which I saw at once to be his office, his link with the past when he had been in practice.

Carolyn was lying on a tilted metal chair of a type I had seen in doctors' offices, which can be either a chair or an operating table. She was unconscious, her face lit up by a spotlight above her head—the only light in the room.

"She is asleep," the doctor whispered. "I have learned how to call either personality into wakefulness at will."

"Then why can't you order one to remain unconscious permanently and end this dual state of affairs?" I asked.

"Because," the doctor whispered, "there is some physiological factor connected with fatigue that controls that ordinarily, and post-hypnotic suggestion seems to have no effect on that whatever."

"Oh," I whispered.

"Just watch now," the doctor requested. "Don't say anything." He stroked the forehead of the sleeping girl soothingly for a moment.

Then he said in a quiet, droning voice, "I want to talk to Caroline. Will you answer, Caroline?"

The lips moved slowly. "Yes," came the answer.

"What happened today, Caroline?" the doctor asked. My eyes were fixed on her lips. They moved as if the spirit within could barely reach them.

"What—do—you—mean?" she asked.

"Did you play the organ?" the doctor suggested.

The face, unearthly looking in the eerie light, smiled happily. "Yes. I played chopsticks with—. I love him. He's—. He's—."

THE doctor's expression became grim as he framed his next question. He spoke slowly. "Is this body you are in your own?"

Carolyn's face became puzzled. "I—don't—know," she replied. "I—seem to remember—dying and yet I wasn't dead. I crawled in with my—sister. But I have no sister."

"Can you leave her and go away?" asked the doctor.

She remained silent.

"Would you leave if I ordered you to leave," Dr. Blech asked.

"No," she said simply.

"Carolinn," the doctor called softly, accenting the difference in pronunciation.

The face changed. No line of it seemed to move, yet the retreat of the spirit of Caroline and the presence of Carolinn could be seen under the white,

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unnatural light of the lamp. I felt cold beads of perspiration on my forehead. I was witnessing something that could not be in reality.

The doctor remained quiet, watching. At last he asked, "What did you do today, Carolinn?"

"I don't know what you mean," came the reply.

"Did you play the organ?" asked Dr. Blech.

"The organ?" she echoed. "No, I didn't play the organ. I—. I—." She became silent.

"Is this your rightful body that you are in?"

"Yes," came the firm reply. Then, in a helpless voice, "But my sister is driving me away and I don't want to go away." A puzzled look came slowly to her face. "But I *have* no sister."

"Can't you drive her away?" asked the doctor.

"She won't let me," she answered slowly. "She—keeps—me—out."

Dr. Blech looked at me significantly. "Are you convinced now?" he asked bitterly.

"No!" My voice was hoarse with emotion. I looked at the doctor's dark, European face, the lights and shadows painted on it by the single light, the glinting dark eyes, as it crouched over the unconscious body of Carolyn—*my* Carolyn.

A thousand thoughts were rushing through my mind. Memories of things I had read in books on hypnotism, psychology, abnormal psychology, and in stories. Things began to fit together. Unrelated things. Something in an old book on mesmerism clicked with something in a book on spiritualism.

"Would it be possible," I asked quietly, "for me to ask questions of Caroline while she is hypnotized?"

"I don't know," the doctor answered. "I could order her to answer your questions and see."

"Do that," I said.

Dr. Blech called Caroline back. I watched the portrayal of the transition of personality on her face.

Finally, when the struggle of transition was over, he gave his order.

"Can you hear me, Caroline?" I asked.

"Yes, Jack. I can hear you," she answered.

So far so good. I glanced at the doctor. He had stood back, his face inscrutable. I stared into the motionless eyes of the girl, which were fixed unmoving on the overhead light. I tried to force my thoughts and will past them to the spirit that lay quiescent behind them.

Then, slowly I asked my question. "Is it your own body that you are in, or your sister's?"

THE doctor's eyes flashed at me, but I held my attention concentrated on Carolyn, waiting for the answer. Finally it came.

"Yes, Jack, it is my body."

I heard the doctor's startled gasp, and looked at him triumphantly. He opened his mouth to say something but I motioned him to silence. I was not through.

"Do you love me, Caroline?" I asked.

"Yes." The answer came faintly.

"With my help, could you drive your sister away so that—?"

With a startled oath the doctor leaped around the table. His sudden attack caught me by surprise. I was borne back. I felt myself falling. I clutched at the doctor, his maniacal face a mask of insane frenzy above me.

My clutching fingers met only empty air. My head struck something hard and sharp. I didn't quite lose consciousness. Dimly I was aware of the doctor standing over me, his breath

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harsh, his face and figure nightmarish in the room's single light.

I saw him go to a cabinet and come back with a roll of adhesive tape. My mind strained to make my muscles obey its will, without success. Then I knew no more.

Consciousness returned slowly. For what seemed like hours I was aware only of a dull beating. I thought at first it must be waves from the ocean beating against the shore. Then an undertone of pain began to accompany each pounding wash of the waves.

I studied this new sensation in a detached way for another hour or two, so it seemed. Then I went to sleep. I awoke with a start that made the pounding begin again. This time it was in my head. But also I could feel. I way lying on something hard and cold. It was dark. I tried to move my hands, but they seemed paralyzed.

I remembered what had happened then, and wondered without surprise if I were dead. The cool, detached way I was thinking made it seem quite plausible that I might be dead.

"I hope, if I *am* dead, that Dr. Blech can drive Caroline out of her body so that she can be with me," I thought absently.

The memory of Dr. Blech made me sit up: A wave of dizziness made me fall back, but the simple act of sitting up had shown me I was still alive. I rolled over and felt the floor with my face. It was made of stone. I must be in some subcellar of the house.

The cool stone floor against my cheek revived me a little. I began to think.

What could the doctor possibly gain by putting me down here? When he released me he would be liable to assault, kidnaping, and many other things, not to mention malpractice. He would probably land in a mental hospital before it was over.

But perhaps he did not ever intend for me to get free! The thought—the inescapable logic of it, made sweat stand out all over me! Then why hadn't he killed me outright?

Maybe he wanted to keep me alive for some mad experiment. Maybe he wanted to gloat while he taunted me. Maybe he still thought I could be of use to him in ridding Carolyn's body of Caroline. *My Carolyn.* I ground my teeth in impotent frustration.

Out of the darkness a throaty chuckle sounded. My hair rose on my scalp.

"I see that you have regained consciousness," the doctor's voice spoke. "I must have dozed while I was waiting."

His lighter flared as he lit a cigarette. It illumined his face, and I thought of Old World creatures of legend as I looked at it fascinatedly. When he put his lighter away the flame of the cigarette as he puffed deeply on it still cast an eerie light over his countenance, making it a mask of evil cunning and insane hate.

His voice was calm and self-assured as he went on.

"I will have to kill you after a while," he said regretfully. "But only if I succeed in what I am going to do. I've thought about it for a long time. You see, there is *one* way in which I can drive the spirit of Caroline from the body and leave only the spirit of my Carolinn."

"I want to explain it to you," he went on. "The native spirit of the body is more firmly entrenched than the obsessor. If I could get the obsessor out just once, I could keep it out permanently by means of static electricity, which is known to confuse it.

"At death the obsessor would leave the body first, since it is the more loosely connected. So, for an instant

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after death, the native spirit would be left in sole possession of the body."

I tried to speak, but my mouth was sealed with tape. Dr. Blech ignored my mumbled sounds and went on.

"Death can be produced instantly and without harm to the body tissues by means of electric shock," he said calmly. "Sometimes the dead person so killed can be restored to life by means of injection of adrenalin into the heart. There are cases on record of that happening."

"SEVERAL times I have tried it out on animals," he continued. "Sometimes I failed to restore life, and sometimes I was able to bring the animal back to life. I've hesitated to attempt it with Carolyn, because it was better to have her sometimes, even though she was not sane, than to lose her entirely, beyond hope of getting her back.

"But now I am faced with the necessity of trying the final experiment," he said sadly. "I must kill my love in order that she might live. And after I have done that I must kill you. If I don't succeed I, of course, will not care to live myself, so there will be no necessity of killing you then.

"I'm sorry, Jack," he said with regret. "You see, I like you very much. But understand that I have loved Carolyn for eleven years. You have loved her only a week. Without her life would be meaningless to me. What you started to say up above,—I saw that you might succeed, and I suddenly realized that I could not let you succeed. You have forced the issue."

There was a sound of a bolt sliding back. An oblong of light appeared in the wall and the floor of the basement came into view as the door swung back. The doctor stood framed in the light.

He looked back at me, and said, "If I fail, someone will find you before long. If I succeed I will be back." With that pronouncement he closed the door. I heard the bolt slide into place. Then the silence became dense.

Frantically I started to work on my wrists. At first I couldn't move them at all. The continual straining against them finally began to produce results. I could move them up and down a little.

The room became stifling as time passed. My breath came in hoarse rasping sobs as desperation and the fear of failure pressed down on me.

HOW LONG WOULD IT TAKE HIM TO GET READY FOR HIS EXPERIMENT. That question pounded at me.

My wrists were sore and numb. Perspiration crept into my eyes and caused them to smart. I was sobbing in hopeless despair when finally I felt my hands slip free.

I cursed the numbness of my fingers that prevented them from freeing my ankles. I chaffed them and gradually brought circulation back to them. After centuries my legs were freed and I stood up.

Which direction was the door? I found the wall and followed it around. I passed three corners and cursed my luck which made me go the long way around. Then the wooden panel was under my bleeding palm. I found the bolt and slid it back.

I half ran, half crawled up the stairs to the first floor of the house. No lights were on, and I stumbled over things in the darkness. It didn't matter, my hoarse, deafening breathing would arouse everybody anyway. I WANTED them awake.

My hands fumbled clumsily at slippery doorknobs. Finally I was climbing the stairs to the second floor. There was a light under the door of the doctor's office. I tried the knob. The door was locked.

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I beat on the panel, shouting hoarsely for the doctor to open up. Other doors opened. Mrs. Andrews came into the hall, alarm and fear on her face. She found the light switch and flooded the hallway with illumination.

I BACKED up and rammed my shoulder against the door. Between breaths I tried to explain what had been going on.

The butler came down from the third floor. At once he joined my efforts to break down the heavy door.

"I've been suspecting Henry's sanity for a long time," he ground out.

Finally, with one last burst of effort, the door gave way. I stepped inside.

Carolyn was not on the operating table. The overhead light was still on, but the room was vacant.

I stood there, stunned, blankly gazing at the empty table under the light, at the sinister emptiness of the white-walled room. With a sinking sensation I saw the dozens of square miles of Chicago, with the doctor somewhere in those wide spaces, carrying out his mad scheme.

A single, despairing, "NO!" sobbed past my lips.

The butler pushed past me to the phone on the desk and rapidly dialed a number. He was calling the police.

"Oh, they're on their way," he said. He hung up.

Almost immediately I heard the distant wail of a siren. The maid's voice in the doorway said that she had called the police when she heard the disturbance.

I sank exhausted into a chair, and leaned my head dejectedly on the table where Carolyn had lain under the hypnotic spell of the mad Viennese doctor a short hour or so ago.

The police came into the room. A quiet man in a tan suit took over. As briefly as I could I told him what had happened.

"Jerry," he said, "go down and see if a car is missing in the garage. Joe, get the license numbers and descriptions of all the cars so that we can broadcast the description of the one the doctor took. You, Bill," pointing at a third man, "get on that phone and see if any calls were made from this phone in the last two hours. Work on long distance. She's the only one who would have any record of calls."

I began to see a glimmering of hope. In a few minutes the description of the car the doctor had taken was being broadcast to all prowl cars. Then a number was repeated by the man at the phone. Dr. Blech had made a call.

The number was put through. I could hear the endless ringing at the other end. Finally, when I had given up hope, a voice answered. The detective spoke swiftly.

"Did Dr. Blech call you a little earlier this morning?"

A pause. Then, "This is the police. No time to explain." Another pause. "Yes." A longer pause. The detective hung up.

"Dr. Blech just left there. He got the key to the other doctor's office. It seems that there are electrical things at that office that Dr. Blech had to have for his experiment. This doctor will meet us at the building where his office is."

He looked at me sympathetically. "I suppose you want to go along," he said.

I nodded and was out of the door ahead of him. The men in the car were silent as the car sped at uncanny speed through the almost deserted streets in the early dawn.

Even at that it was almost fifteen minutes before we drew up in front of the building. A car sat at the curb. The detectives looked at it, then nodded to one another. It was the car the mad

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doctor had taken.

I looked up. Far up a light shone through one of the office windows. Up there Dr. Blech was performing his mad experiment. He was going to kill Carolyn, then bring her back to life! But he himself had said that probably she would not COME back to life."

THERE was a maddening delay while a slow moving night watchman came to the door. Finally we were in, and speeding upward in an elevator. It came to a stop and the night watchman opened the door. Quickly we stepped into the hall and traversed the fifty feet of hallway to the door the light came through.

The night watchman had given up the master key and gone back down to answer the frantic buzzing of the elevator bell that had begun when we were part way up.

"Probably Dr. Graney," the detective had remarked, referring to the doctor whose office Dr. Blech was in.

With quick efficiency the detective inserted the master key in the lock and opened the door. The other men had drawn their guns. The detective flung open the door and jumped aside.

There was a second of silence while we took in the empty reception room and the details of the layout. At one side was a half-opened door. The faint hum and crackling of electric machinery came faintly to our ears.

In a few short strides I was past the police and standing in the doorway of the inner room. Carolyn lay on an operating table, motionless. Dr. Blech stood a few feet away, his hand resting on a switch on a panel of a complicated electrical device.

For a moment he looked at me, triumph, gloating, and madness written in the lines of his face. Then he plunged home the switch.

Carolyn's body gave a single, convulsive jerk as the unleashed forces from the machine seared their way through her flesh. Then the doctor pulled the switch open.

She was dead! Carolyn was dead!

The police tried to crowd past me.

"Wait," I ordered. "She is dead. If we interfere now, nothing can save her. Dr. Blech MUST be allowed to finish."

"You are right, my dear Mr. Marley," Dr. Blech said. His voice held triumph and silent amusement. He turned his eyes to a clock on the wall, his hand grasping a hypodermic syringe lying on a white table at his side. The needle was at least six inches long, and looked fragile.

I watched the seconds move by, marked by the sweep of a long second hand on the face of the clock. I didn't breathe.

Then, slowly, Dr. Blech slipped the point of the needle between two ribs and shoved it toward the heart. I watched the needle gradually grow shorted. Finally it became stationary.

Carefully, deliberately, the plunger went down, forcing the fluid in the hypodermic needle into the heart. The plunger stopped. Then the needle was withdrawn.

A faint flush appeared on the pale skin of the breast. The nostrils quivered and the chest expanded convulsively. Carolyn was alive again! But WHICH Carolyn would it be?

Dr. Blech stood quietly, a faint sneer on his face, waiting.

A stranger pushed past me, his eyes taking in the details of the silent drama. He felt for Carolyn's pulse, but said nothing. Almost carelessly he pulled back her eyelid, exposing the white of the eye, and then let it drop back into place.

Dr. Blech stood motionless. He seemed not to be aware that the other

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doctor was there.

Dr. Graney looked at the police, and pointing to Dr. Blech, said, "Take this man into custody."

Two officers moved carefully around the operating table and took hold of Dr. Blech's arm. He moved unresisting, his eyes blank. They led him out into the reception room.

DR. GRANEY glanced hastily at Carolyn, then went to a desk phone, calling a number after dialing operator. He spoke briefly into the phone and then hung up.

"The hospital is rushing over a trained nurse," he said briskly. "Now all of you clear out. The next few hours are going to be nip and tuck. If she pulls through all right you can see her then," he said, looking at me.

"You might come back in an hour and wait in the reception room," he called after me as I went into the other room.

I didn't leave the reception room. The Chicago police force turned out to be human. They brought me up some coffee, and one of their men stayed with me.

The doctor came out and had a cup of it too, once. He drank it in silence and then went back to Carolyn, closing the door behind him.

I paced the floor. Which would it be? That question kept pounding into my brain. And there could be no answer until she opened her eyes and spoke. Which would it be?

Nine o'clock came. The regular nurse moved about the room. People came in and sat down, and read magazines. After a curious glance at me and the policeman they left us alone.

And the panel of the inner office remained silent and uncommunicative.

Finally it moved. The door swung open idly and the doctor, a white coat on now, smiled at me and said, "You can come in now."

I walked slowly through the door. Carolyn lay on a cot against the wall. Her blue-green eyes were open. A smile was on her lips.

"She's been asking for you," the doctor whispered in my ear.

Still the doubt remained. I walked fearfully toward her.

When I hesitated she motioned for me to sit beside her on the edge of the cot.

Then the low, husky voice, rich and sweet, came from her lips. "Remember chopsticks?"

Wordlessly I nodded and took her in my arms. It was MY CAROLYN! MY CAROLYN!

WE WERE able to take her home that afternoon. A nurse came along, and Carolyn had to be careful for several days, but she had suffered no real ill effects from the experience she had gone through.

In a week we were able to have our first swimming date together.

"Of course," Dr. Graney had said to me when we were alone one day after Carolyn came home, "we don't know if the other personality has been definitely done away with. I don't put much stock in Dr. Blech's theory of two spirits. I stick to the simple split personality theory.

"The results are going to make medical history, though. The idea of shock as a cure for schizophrenia is not new. It is used quite regularly with very good results. But the extreme remedy, actually administering a fatal shock and then restoring life, as a cure for it,—that has never been tried before.

"If Dr. Blech's sanity had not been affected he might possibly be vindicated and become the founder of a new school

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of psychiatry. But, unfortunately, he will never be able to resume a normal life again."

"How is he?" I asked.

The doctor shook his head. "It seemed no surprise to him that Carolyn was normal when she recovered. In fact, he still insists that his theory of two spirits is correct. He claims that the spirit of the other girl is with him now! That she went to him while Carolyn lay dead on the operating table."

The doctor shook his head again and sighed. "He was a fine man. Devoted eleven years of special study on this case. But now— He's at a private sanitarium. He spends most of his time just sitting, his eyes staring blankly at nothing."

The doctor chuckled mirthlessly. "He sounds like a man talking over the phone to his wife. All he does is say, 'Yes, dear. Yes, dear. I know, dear. Yes, dear.' The's too bad, too. At one time he was considered the foremost psychiatrist in Europe."

I'm sitting in the gatekeeper's cottage now. I'm supposed to be pounding out another story. You see, I've turned the cottage into a studio office.

The heavy oak door is open, and a soft breeze is mischievously pushing some leaves across the doorstep. Through the open doorway, as I sit at my typewriter, I can see the flat expanse of half dead grass, as it stretches to the house. I'm going to do something about that. It *could* be a nice lawn, young and alive.

But I can't concentrate on writing a story. I just sit here and listen to the sweet, quiet strains of the electric organ. No, I don't know the tune it's playing. Some classic, or maybe it isn't a classic, since it has a nice melody. Something slow and beautiful like Ol' Man River. Only that isn't it.

And Carolyn is sitting at the organ in the music room, her fingers on the ivory keys. In a moment I will give up, and go up there to the music room myself. I'll sit down beside her and play Chopsticks. And our hands will get mixed up, and then we won't play the organ.

But doggone it. I've got to earn a living. Look at all the material I have for stories now. A mysterious, old mansion with at least one secret cellar that I know of. A moth-eaten lawn, a thick stone fence, and a sinister gatekeeper's cottage. An old lady, an English butler, and a four-car garage. And a girl with blue-green eyes for the heroine.

I've even plagiarized on a title to start the thing off with. The editor is crying for a story. I'm almost broke. And here I sit, listening to the sweet, enchanting music of the organ, staring helplessly at the blank piece of paper in my typewriter.

The only thing on it is the title, and I'll probably throw that out. Even now it's beginning to look a little corny. But it fits.

Carolyn died once. Up in that office I saw her die, and live again. Some day she'll die again, for the last time. Before then I hope we will have many, so damn many happy years that it won't really matter when the time comes.

It's a story in a million, if I could only write it! But all I've got so far is the title.

"TWICE TO DIE"

WATCH FOR:—

"THE SPIRIT OF TOFFEE"

By CHARLES F. MYERS

THE HILARIOUS NEW ADVENTURE OF THE "DREAM" GIRL

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DEMON MARRIAGES

By FRAN FERRIS

SOMETIMES a demon lover is in the body of a snake. Or he might be a fallen angel who holds a lesser position in hell. He might be the ghost of a man who once lived and loved as a member of society. Although dead he still holds an indecent interest in the affairs of women. It makes him jealous when marriages take place so special precautions have to be taken, such as placing his image in the bridal chamber in recognition of his rights. The demon may not be in love with the bride but he is jealous of human happiness. When praising one's self or friends or boasting, it is necessary to knock on wood to drown out the voices so that the demon will not hear. A wedding is a time of rejoicing, so to fool the demon into thinking that it is a time of sorrow, the ancients used to break crockery and destroy property.

This demon lover superstition lasted in Europe for many centuries, and the courts were full of witchcraft cases. Thousands of men and women were found guilty of being married to demons. During the Middle Ages there were both male and female demons available as mates. The male demons were called "incubi" and the females were called "succubi." There were more "incubi" so more women were burned at the stake for demon marriages. Hundreds of beautiful girls paid the supreme penalty, for it was believed that demons were especially fond of girls with luxuriant hair.

We no longer believe in the existence of demon lovers, but the customs that originated when such ideas were prevalent are still with us. We go through ceremonies that were originally intended to protect husbands from the jealous acts of the demon rivals.

The bridal veil was intended as a disguise, and the groom did not visit her on the day before the ceremony. In this way they threw the demon off the track, and confused him so that he would not know who was getting married. Then during the ceremony, if he discovered who was getting married it was difficult to interfere with bridesmaids and groomsmen around.

* * *

BECOMING ANOTHER PERSON

By SANDY MILLER

AMONG savage people the man's name was practically part of his very soul. If a man changed his name he became another person. It was the custom in latter years when an Orthodox Jew was taken very ill and not expected to live, for his friends and relatives to go to the synagogue and change his religious name. They thought that when the angel of death was sent to pick up a soul, that he was told to take someone with a certain name. If the friends could change the name before the grim messenger's arrival, it would be difficult for him to tell who he should take and he might not take anyone away.

There have been many ways of hoodwinking the immortals. Another way to become another person was their pantomime of being born again. The sick person took the part of a new-born infant being brought into the world. This custom was also used in curing disease. In some countries the sufferer was passed through a hole in a rock or a tree, symbolizing the act of being reborn. A cure for rickets was slitting the trunk of an ash tree and passing the sick child through it head first. The slit in the tree was then bound up and if it healed, the child was expected to recover.

In olden times doorways were sacred and were in part, symbolic of rebirth. Carrying the bride across the threshold is a custom handed down to present times. One should step over the threshold and never on it. To stumble over it is bad luck and one should go back and try it again if this should happen. Sneezing in the doorway is considered bad luck, as well as sitting on the door-sill. Some ancients used to bow down and kiss the threshold before entering. The Arabs used to pronounce the word "Bismillah" when opening the door for the first time each morning.

It used to be important to guard the doors against the entrance of demons, ghosts and other mystic creatures of the darkness. As there are more of them about at the time of a death, the family took the precaution of hanging crepe on the door to frighten them away.

* * *

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DOUBLE CROSS IN

I'M NOT asking you to take my word for this. You can check it in the papers if you want to. The ad was in the New York *Express,* September 18, 1945.

The ad read:

"Opening for young man of adventurous nature. Opportunity for travel, excitement, glory."

There was an address in the lower thirties, just off Fourth avenue.

I saw the ad and I thought it over. I'd been in the army for the past four years and the travel and excitement didn't appeal to me. But I liked the part about the glory. The Donovan clan is great for glory.

When I got my discharge, which was right after the shooting stopped, I went to a bar and drank a silent toast to myself in the mirror.

"Paddy Donovan," I said to the square red face that looked back at me from the mirror. "You're out and you're staying out. You want no more part of any army. The Germans have been shooting at you and first sergeants have been yelling at you for the last three years. And between the two of them you're lucky to have your sanity left. So if there's another war they'll have to go to the woods to find you, Paddy. And they'll have to burn the woods and sift the ashes."

A group of half-naked men rushed up the slope, crudely fashioned clubs and spears held menacingly

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DOUBLE TIME

by WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

When Paddy Donovan took the job he knew he would have to travel a lot — but he didn't know it would be time traveling — nor did he begin to see the danger that went with it

I meant every word of that. I lifted my drink and drained it off, thinking how pleasant it was going to be playing civilian again.

I played civilian for about two months and then while I still had some money left, I decided to go to work. So I started looking at the ads.

And on September 18 I saw this ad. I thought it over a while and finally decided to investigate. I clipped it out, stuck it in my wallet and headed for the address.

The house was one of those brownstone front affairs, which had been classy thirty year ago. I went up the worn steps and punched the bell.

The door was opened by a tired, elderly woman, in a white apron, and holding a feather duster in her hand. She blew a stray strand of gray hair from her face and said, "What do you want?"

"Someone at this address put an ad in the paper," I said. "Do you know anything about it?"

"That would be Professor O'Neill," she said. "He's on the third floor. Him and his daughter."

She pulled the door open wider and I walked into a dim hallway that smelled of old paint and cabbage.

I WENT up the rickety steps to the third floor. There was a landing on which two doors opened. I knocked on the first door.

An old man opened the door and blinked at me. He had white hair and skin that looked like leather that had been out in the sun too long. He blinked his watery blue eyes again and said, "yes?" in a thin voice.

I said, "are you Professor O'Neill, and did you put an ad in yesterday's paper?"

His face showed some animation. "Why, yes indeed young man. Won't you come in?"

I followed him into a room furnished about the way I expected. Shabby chairs, worn rug, junk and bric-a-brac that was fashionable thirty years ago.

He motioned me to a chair and sat down himself with his back to the window. The sun made a halo of his white hair. He wasn't dressed well, worn trousers, a white shirt with an old-fashioned black string tie, and a black velvet jacket, but somehow he managed to look dignified.

"I am very happy to see you," he said. And he sounded like he meant it. "I have tried very hard to get the right young man for the job I have in mind, but it's so very hard." He shook his head and said, "So very very hard," and then he looked out the window and sighed.

Supposing you tell me about it," I said. "I may be the right man."

"Yes," he said, brightening. "You may very well be. Now, first, what is your name?"

"Paddy Donovan," I said.

"Excellent," he beamed. "We Irish have imagination. And that is what this job will require of you. Imagination and faith. I am Professor O'Neill."

"That's what the landlady told me," I said.

He looked gloomily at the floor. "She is a witless creature. An unfortunate type. We do not get on well." But he didn't seem to be able to stay gloomy very long. His eyes brightened and he looked back at me. "Now about the job. You will. . . ."

He got that far when the door opened and a girl came into the room. She was a slim red-haired girl with bright blue eyes. She was wearing a house dress that looked like it had been fitted by an angel, and her ankles were about

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the size of my two thumbs.

"Ah, Sally," the professor smiled. "You're just in time to meet Mr. Paddy Donovan. He has answered my advertisement."

I stood up and I felt clumsy and uncomfortable with this slim young girl smiling at me. I mumbled something to her and sat down again, but I couldn't look away from her. She sat down on the edge of her father's chair and put a light hand on his shoulder.

"I was just about to tell Mr. Donovan about the job I have in mind," he said to her.

"I don't think you should be tiring yourself out, daddy," she said. "You've been working very hard lately. And maybe Mr. Donovan won't be interested. Did you tell him you won't be able to pay him any money?"

She looked at me as she said that, and she was telling me nicely I was wasting my time if I was looking for money. She didn't like saying it, I could tell. She looked embarrassed.

"No, I didn't," the professor said uneasily. "I thought I'd tell him about the job first."

"Well, daddy," the girl smiled at him, "young men can't afford to work for nothing, you know. You'd better wait until you have a little money before you start your work."

THE professor sighed and looked gloomily at the floor.

I said, "I'm not interested in money. What's money, after all?"

Why did my big mouth say that? I don't know. I'm Irish and I worship the green. Especially when it's in neat stacks and has Washington's or Lincoln's picture on it. Maybe it was the way the girl looked at me. Maybe I thought she was wonderful. I don't know. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before.

The professor beamed fondly at me. "Imagination and faith, my boy. I see you have both. Now about the job."

His daughter said, "but daddy," and then she looked at me, and it was such a grateful look that I felt my chest grow about six inches. "I guess you're both beyond hope," she said, with a little laugh.

"Of course we are," the professor said. "Now! I said in the ad that this job offers an opportunity for travel. Do you have any idea of the kind of travel I meant?"

"No," I said, "I haven't."

"Well." He paused and looked at me with bright, excited eyes. "I meant travel in time."

"Travel in time," I repeated matter-of-factly. "That should be interesting. I've always thought. . . . My mind, which had been thinking about a pair of slim ankles, and bright blue eyes, suddenly realized what the words meant. *"What!"*

He smiled. "You're astonished. That is natural. Everyone is at first."

My collar felt too tight. I wanted to get up and march firmly out of that room without looking back, but the slim ankles and the blue eyes, kept me right in my chair.

"I don't understand," I said, and my voice was weak.

"Naturally you don't. You must take some of the things I'm going to tell you on faith. You have faith. Some of the things I'm going to tell you will require that you use imagination. You have imagination. So there is no difficulty."

"I'll try," I said. "I'm willing to listen to anything that doesn't have the army mixed up in it somewhere. That's the only thing I won't have anything to do with, Professor. The army."

"I think I understand," he said.

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"But you have no worries on that score. Now I'm going to tell you about time travel."

He put a thin cigar in his mouth, lighted it, and blew a cloud of smoke expansively at the ceiling.

"First of all," he said. "Time travel is nothing new or revolutionary. As a matter of fact I believe it is one of the oldest things in the world. And when we conquer all the problems of time travel it will not be by using new principles, but rather by ancient ones which have been forgotten by man through the ages.

"I BELIEVE that early man had the power of transporting himself through time and space, as a means of escape from his enemies which were the early animals and birds, which were stronger and faster than man. If he didn't have some means of escape from them he would have perished.

"Now through the ages man developed weapons which put him on superior plane to the animals and gradually this ability of his to project himself in time slowly atrophied. That is a common phenomena. When a man's faculties are no longer used and needed they disappear. Our sense of smell, for instance, was once as acute as the animals, because we needed it in the struggle for survival. But it has atrophied now until it only can differentiate between the most violent of contrasts, such as perfumes and garbage.

"Immanuel Kant was the first great philosopher to clearly understand this. He perceived that time and space were not objective properties, but subjective ones, belonging to the mind, just as our instincts do. But he stopped short before he completed his thesis. Or perhaps he was afraid of its daring implications and wisely chose to leave further speculation to a more liberal age.

"No matter. I am convinced that time and space are properties of the mind, and the ability to use them, just as we use our will and reason, has been lost to man, simply because the necessity for using them has disappeared."

"I didn't understand half the words he used. But the ones I did understand made sense in a funny way. It was like listening to somebody talk about atoms. You knew it was right, but it still sounds pretty silly.

"I," he continued, "have developed a machine which artificially stimulates those dormant abilities. And with it I can travel back in time just as easily as you would travel from here to Chicago."

That was quite a statement. Some of my native cynicism was returning. But I glanced down and saw Sally's neat little foot swinging in a slow circle and I forgot all my doubts. Mind may be superior to matter, but when the matter is a pair of slim ankles it works out the other way around.

The professor kept talking and I tried to listen but it was hard. But finally he said something that caught my attention.

"I am ready to go right now," he said. "Will you come with me?"

"Where?" I asked blankly. But I knew what he meant and I didn't like it. He wanted to go back into time. And before I did anything like that I wanted to think out all the angles.

I was right. He said, "I am ready to make my first experiment and I need you. I am an old man and Sally is just a girl. We need a young man, a strong, fearless young man to go with us."

"Oh," I said, "is Sally going?"

SHE smiled at me, a wonderful smile, and said, "I wouldn't let you two

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go alone. You might never come back to me." The way she said that made it sound like it was important that I come back. I felt my chest getting tight again.

"Of course I'll go," I heard my big mouth say. And I wasn't sorry.

"Excellent," the professor said. "We will make the attempt immediately."

He got up and crossed the room to a large desk against the wall. From one of the drawers he removed a metal box, about six inches square, with handles attached to each side. He placed this on a table in the middle of the room.

"I have some work to do first," he said. "A few final preparations. But it won't take me a minute."

Sally stood up and said, "I'll make a cup of coffee."

She smiled at me so prettily as she left the room that I was in a daze until she returned with a tray and three cups of coffee.

The professor meanwhile had been tinkering with his metal box and pausing every few minutes to thumb through a thick file of dusty notes.

Sally gave me a cup of coffee, put cream and sugar in it, and it was fine. I love a girl who can make good coffee.

The professor had finished by that time and we drank our coffee without saying much. Both he and Sally looked serious and I was busy looking at Sally.

Finally we were ready.

The professor motioned us to the table. "Now," he said, "We will each hold one of the handles. If my theories are right it won't take more than a few minutes for the stimulus to work. Ready?"

I put my right hand around the thin metal hand-grip. It was warm. I don't know whether it was my imagination but I felt something coming out of that box and up my arm. I started to sweat.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"I'm not really sure," the professor said. "But I think it will be Egypt."

I began to feel something. And it wasn't imagination. My head felt light and I thought maybe I was going to fall on my face. I looked at Sally and she looked a long way off. And her big blue eyes were going in circles.

"Professor," I gasped. "It's workin'."

"I know, I know," he said excitedly.

"I'm scared," Sally cried.

"I'll be with you," I said through the fog that was coming in between us. "Don't be frightened, Sally." I tried to reach her, to put my free arm around her shoulders, but I couldn't make it.

I was falling into a shimmering, spinning tunnel of blackness. It had no bottom.

I CAME out of that blackness slowly. I saw light a long way in front of me and I put out my hands toward it and then I opened my eyes.

The first thing I saw was Sally. And that was a wonderful sight. She was sitting beside me, stroking my forehead with cool gentle fingers.

I was lying on a big soft couch, looking up at a gold ceiling. I looked to my right and I saw a big brass vase, with a smoky incense coming out of it. I looked left and saw silken tapestries on the wall. I looked down and saw a big tiger skin on a hard-packed dirt floor.

The professor was pacing up and down on this floor, reading a long sheet of paper with an anxious look on his face.

Sally said, "Do you feel all right?"

"I guess so," I said. I really didn't know. My head ached and my stomach was jumping like a juke joint, but

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otherwise I was okay.

I sat up and looked around. The room we were in wasn't so big. The walls were covered with silk and the light came from some stuff that was burning in big pots in each corner of the room. The smoke smelled like smoldering tar.

"Did we make it?" I asked foolishly.

"Yes, yes," the professor said excitedly. "We made it my boy."

"Wonderful," I said. "Let's go out and meet the natives. I could stand some fresh air."

"Not just yet," the professor said. And he frowned worriedly at the floor. "I have already met a few of them. They are terrified of us. They put us in here to await the decision of their council. I can understand enough of their dialect to converse with them. And I am not sure yet that they are friendly."

"Fine way to treat visitors," I said bitterly. "Here we come a couple of thousand years to see them and they treat us like lepers."

"We had better go slowly," the professor said. "For myself I am not afraid. But Sally. . . ."

He looked at her and I got what he meant. It scared me.

We didn't have time for any more conversation. A gong sounded from somewhere and the silk tapestries on one wall were pulled far enough aside to let a woman into the room.

She was a filthy old hag, barefooted, and dressed in bright loose clothes that were covered with clasps of gold and silver. Gray lank hair fell over her face. Her skin was brown and dirty.

She was carrying a metal tray with three cups of some kind of liquid. She set the tray on the floor, and kept her eyes down. She looked as scared as an Irishman going home on a dark night through the fairy country in Kildare.

SHE started away but the professor stopped her with a word I didn't understand.

She answered something, and then they gabbled back and forth for a while. The woman wanted to get away, she kept backing toward the wall but the professor kept throwing questions at her, which she answered sullenly.

When she finally departed the professor turned to us and his face was grave.

"What's wrong?" I asked. And I wasn't feeling too chipper.

"Perhaps nothing," he said. He made an effort and smiled down at the tray. "At least they aren't going to starve us." He picked up one of the cups and sipped the contents. "It's an herb wine," he said. "It won't hurt us. Better try it."

It wasn't bad stuff. Hot and spicy and strong. It made me feel a lot better almost immediately.

"Now let's have the bad news," I said. "I could tell from your face when the old crone was talking, that she wasn't giving you a good thing in the fifth race at Olympia Fields."

"I don't like to admit failure," he said. "But I think we had better leave this place. The woman told me of her religion. And it isn't a pretty topic. These people are members of the original *Kultibar* clan, an Egyptian sect whose worship is based on human sacrifice. I don't know whether we are in any danger, but I don't like to take a chance."

Sally's hand touched mine. I held it tightly and tried to smile at her. She looked white and scared. I wasn't going to let anything happen to her.

"Let's vamoose, if we can," I told the professor. "We can find some place where they're more hospitable."

"Oh, yes, let's go," Sally cried. "I'm not a sissy, but this place gives me the

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creeps."

I patted her hand. "I'll take care of you," I said. I felt very brave and Irish.

"Very well," the professor said. "We won't wait any longer."

He went to a corner of the room and, from behind one of the smoking pots, he took the metal box, with the four hand-grips. He placed it on the couch beside us.

"Let's hurry," Sally said.

I put my hand on one of the handles and put my other arm around her. She pressed a little closer to me and smiled.

The smile was enough to knock me silly, but the stuff coming out of the metal box was helping. I felt the familiar sensations. My head felt light and I was getting dizzy.

I tightened my arm around Sally's shoulder and then that big black tunnel opened up. And in I fell.

I CAME to first this time. The professor and Sally were lying on the floor beside me, and my heart pumped with relief when I saw that we were back in their dingy apartment.

I picked Sally up in my arms and put her in a chair, and she came around pretty quickly. She gave a relieved sigh when she saw where she was.

The professor was stirring and he opened his eyes. He scrambled to his feet and picked up the metal box, which had been lying beside him. He put it away carefully in the desk drawer.

My mind was full of ideas.

"Now look, professor," I said, "have you ever thought of the money you could make with this thing? Why there's millions in it! You could just sell the patents and retire for life. Or you could handle it yourself. Either way, you can't lose.

"Why you could start a time-travel bureau. Send people back into the past on vacations."

He shuddered. "I don't want to do anything like that. I just want to work on my theories. I'm afraid I'm no business man, my boy."

"But listen," I pleaded. "You could make a fortune and then use the money to continue your research."

He smiled wanly. "Perhaps you're right. But I'm an old man and I don't have the enthusiasm of youth. It would take money to get started. And I'm too old to go to work. I'm afraid I'll just go along the way I am."

"Sally!" I said, turning to her. "Can't you make him listen to reason? This is too good a chance to throw away. I have a little money left and I'd be glad to help out. I was going to buy a chicken farm, but . ."

"No!" Sally said firmly. She shook her small head emphatically. "Your money goes for the chicken farm! I won't have you throwing it away on father's ideas."

"I won't be throwing it away," I yelled. I was beginning to get annoyed with both of them. I had never met such short-sighted people. "Let's call it a loan. Or give me ten per cent of the stock."

It was a hard fight but I finally swung them around. The professor agreed to take a thousand dollars of mine, but he insisted on making it a fifty-fifty proposition. It was a steal, but I couldn't talk him out of it.

I was afraid they might change their minds so I went and got the money the minute they agreed.

The professor looked at the cash as if he'd never seen that much money in one piece in his life. He was like a little kid with a new red wagon.

Sally threw her arms around my neck and kissed me and then she started to blush.

"I don't know what you must think

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of me," she said.

"You'd slap my face if you knew," I grinned.

She laughed as if I was kidding.

They both had things to do then, so I made a date with Sally for that night, and left. I spent half the day walking through the park and smelling the flowers. I kept thinking about Sally. I felt warm and happy.

AT SIX o'clock I went back to my room, took a bath and used my after shave lotion all over, just so I'd smell nice. Then I dressed, put on a new tie and went out into the street.

I bought a big bouquet of flowers and by seven o'clock I was punching the door of her boarding house.

The woman in the white apron opened the door.

I started in but she held up her hand.

"And where are you going?" she asked.

"To see Miss Sally O'Neill," I said.

"Not that it's any of your business, but my mother taught me to be polite to old folks."

She laughed bitterly.

"You think you are!" she said. "She and that old man of her skipped out."

"You're crazy," I said.

"Crazy, am I?" They left owing me a month's rent, the dirty chiselers."

I didn't listen for anymore. I went up the stairs two at a time. The door of their room was open so I barged right in. I didn't see anybody in the front room, so I went into the next room, a small bedroom. The closets were empty. The drawers of the bureau were empty.

There was nobody home.

I came back into the front room and my heart was as heavy as an Irishman's hangover. I don't know what I was thinking. I was too sad and confused to think I couldn't understand it. Why would they skip out?

I walked over to the desk and jerked open the drawer. The metal box was still there. I looked at it. There was no bottom on it and all that was inside was a few wires and coils that looked like a Rube Goldberg invention.

I couldn't understand why the professor had left his time machine.

Still carrying it in my hand I went slowly down the stairs. The landlady was standing at the bottom, a satisfied smirk on her face.

"Now, who's crazy?" she said.

"They must have left a message," I said.

"They left nothing," she snapped. "They were just deadbeats. I should have known better than to trust them. Now I've got work to do."

I noticed something then. My nose twitched. There was a faint smell of smouldering tar in the air.

I looked at the old hag of a landlady and horrible suspicion burst into my honest Irish head. I looked at the big bouquet in my left hand and the time machine in my right, and the horrible suspicion kept growing.

"Where's the basement?" I yelled at the old woman.

"Have you lost your senses?" she cried. "I'll call the police if you don't get along."

"You won't be calling the police," I said.

I turned and walked toward the back of the house, with her following and making an ungodly racket. I found a door that led to steps that went down. And I went down. The smell of tar was stronger.

AT THE bottom I found a light switch. I flicked it on. I was in a boiler room. The old crone was right

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behind me, screaming unprintable things in my ears.

"Silence hag!" I shouted.

I walked across the boiler room to another door. I pulled it open and saw a heavy piece of silk hanging there with a slit cut in.

I looked at the woman. She wasn't talking now. She was just looking scared.

I pushed through the silk into a room I'd seen before. The floor was dirt, the walls were covered with silk, and there was a big couch in the middle. There was also a moth eaten tiger skin on the floor. I looked at the woman and I was seeing her in bright clothes with phony silver and gold clips.

I threw the bouquet on the floor and jumped on it. Then I tried to pull my hair out.

"Schemers, cheaters, swindlers!" I bellowed.

I was so mad I hurt. I saw it all now. I turned and glared at the old crone.

"They knock me out with a pill in my coffee. "They bring me down here and tell me I'm in Egypt. You come in pretending to be an Egyptian and . . ."

I couldn't go on. It was too mortifying.

"I didn't know anything about it," the old crone mumbled. "I thought it was a practical joke."

"My thousand dollars!" I cried.

I grabbed her by the head of the hair and lifted her until she was standing on her toes.

"Woman," I said sternly. "Where did they go? Don't lie! I am just back from Europe where we shot the German women from our cannons for sport."

Her eyes rolled wildly and then she started talking. I got an address from her, and then I let her go.

I paused just long enough to kick the bouquet once more and then I left.

I STILL had the time machine. And I had an idea. Not a simple idea, or an easy idea, but an Irish idea, full of imagination and cunning.

The arrangements took me several hours. I called a half dozen of the boys who'd followed me around Europe and they all thought I was either drunk or crazy. Or both. But they all agreed to help.

And I had other arrangements to make, and they were still harder. But finally everything was done and I hopped into a cab and headed for the address the landlady had given me.

This house was just as beat-up as the one they'd had in the lower thirties. It was a two story building with dirty brick front. I paid the driver and went into the vestibule.

There were two bells there and I punched the one that didn't have a name-card under it. I figured they wouldn't have had the time to get their name up yet.

The buzzer sounded and I pulled open the door and started up the steps.

A voice called down, "who is it?"

The voice was Sally's. It still sent shivers up my back.

"Did you forget we had a date tonight, darlin'?" I answered.

I heard a gasp and then I turned the corner of the stairs and there she was, looking down at me like I was a ghost.

Her legs were just at the level of my eyes so I didn't notice the expression on her face.

"Paddy," she said weakly, "we were just talking about you."

"That's nice," I said. "And how is the professor?"

I was standing beside her then and she still hadn't moved.

She just stared at me, white-faced

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and scared.

I put a hand under her arm and said, "Aren't you going to ask me in?"

"Of—of course, Paddy," she said.

We went into a room that wasn't very pleasant. The professor was reading a paper, and when he saw me, I thought he was going to choke.

But I didn't give either of 'em a chance to talk. I just smiled and took a seat.

"I've been worryin' all day about whether a thousand dollars was going to be enough," I said. "So I brought along some more just in case." I smiled cheerfully. "The landlady told me where you'd gone. I can understand that you'd want to get away by yourself so you can work on the time machine."

"Yes, that was it," the professor spluttered. "I—I felt I'd work faster, off by myself. And Sally decided to come and help me."

"Sure," I said.

I opened the box which I had in my hand and took out the time machine. "But I couldn't understand why you left this. So I brought it along. And you know what?" I smiled brightly at both of them, as they shook their heads slowly. "We're going to take a little trip. Right now."

"Trip," the professor said weakly. "Where?"

"Back into time," I said sweetly. "Are you ready?"

"Well," the professor coughed, "I don't know but what . . ."

"Fine," I said.

"Paddy," Sally said miserably, "we know you must hate us, but do you have to go through all this? Can't you make it short and clean?"

"But darlin'," I protested, "why should I hate you? I don't know what you're talkin' about. We're just going to take a little trip. And first I'm going to make a coffee." I smiled again at both of them. They must have been awfully sick of that smile. "And you two just wait right here."

I WENT out in the kitchen and heated the coffee that was still in the pot. Then I put the sleeping powder I'd bought at the drug store in two of the cups.

I gave one of those to the Professor and one to Sally.

"Drink up and we'll be off," I said.

They drank the coffee while I set up the time machine. Then I made them put their hands on the hand-grips, and all the while I kept smiling and chattering.

The powders didn't take long to work. The professor started nodding almost immediately, and within a minute his head had fallen to his chest and he was snoring quietly.

"What have you done to him?" Sally cried indignantly.

"I put a finger to my lips. "The stimulus is working," I whispered.

"You beast! You. . . ." She stopped with mouth open and then widened it to a deep yawn. "I feel sleepy," she said. "I don't know what it is, but . . ." She yawned again and then she was sleeping. She looked lovelier than ever asleep.

I picked her up and slung her over my shoulder. I grabbed the time machine with my free hand and went down the stairs. The car was waiting at the curb. I put Sally in the back and got in beside her.

The driver, Dilly Jones, a good lad who got his Purple Heart the same day I got mine, looked back at me dubiously.

"This is serious business, Paddy," he said. "I hope you know what you're doin'."

"Drive on, Dilly," I ordered. "Every-

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thing is under control."

He drove on. It had started to rain, and an occasional flash of heat lightning streaked across the dark sky.

We drove across the bridge into Brooklyn and then about twenty more miles, until we hit the country. He pulled the car off the road into a grove of trees. There wasn't a house in sight.

I picked Sally up again and carried her about a hundred yards from the car. I put her down on the soggy ground underneath a spreading tree and I laid down beside her. All you could see from there was trees and rain and tangled underbrush. The lightning was flashing regularly now, and thunder was booming on the horizon.

I placed the time machine carefully between us and then I waited for Sally to wake up. The rain helped. When I saw her eyes blinking I closed mine.

A minute later I heard her cry out and then she was tugging frantically at my shoulder. I blinked a little bit and then sat up, a great look of surprise on my face.

"Imagine this," I said.

"Paddy," she cried, "where are we?"

"I don't know," I said, shaking my head. "Looks like the time machine really worked."

She was wet and miserable. She snuggled up to me like a half-drowned kitten. "Take me out of here," she said miserably. "I'm licked, Paddy."

"I wish I could," I said. I said, "What's that?" and pointed off toward the trees.

She looked to where I pointed and gave a little cry. "Paddy, what are they?"

SIX or eight half-naked men came toward us from the trees. They were plastered with mud and carried clubs in their hands.

"Be brave," I said. "I recognize them. They are the original members of the old Druid clan, a notorious sect that flourished in Ireland centuries ago."

She whimpered and crept closer to me.

The leader of the little group was a powerfully built young man, whose name was Terrance O'Toole. He had driven a tank with great success in Belgium and Germany. He was my best buddy. But now he did look like a druid. Mud was plastered in his hair and over his body, and he was scowling ferociously.

He pointed the club at me and made noises in his throat. I made noises back at him.

"What did he say?" Sally whimpered.

"It looks bad," I said. "I just happen to be able to speak his dialect. These people have a horrible religion. They burn maidens to appease their blood-thirsty god."

"Maidens?" she quavered.

Terrence grunted some more at me and I grunted back.

"Not so good," I whispered to Sally. "He asked me if we were married."

"Did you tell him we were?" she cried.

I shook my head sorrowfully. "I couldn't tell a big fib like that. I had to tell him the truth darlin'."

Terrence turned to the six men standing behind him and grinned hideously. Then he pointed his club at Sally and leered.

She clutched my arm. "Paddy," she pleaded! "Tell them we're married. Please!"

"I won't lie," I said firmly. "But I can fix it so I won't have to lie. Will you marry me?"

"Oh, Paddy," she wailed. "Anything!"

I raised my hand in a signal and

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two more of my buddies appeared, dragging a wet, indignant, but legal Justice of the Peace between them.

"It just so happens," I said, "that we have here one of their priests. He can marry us."

And he did. He fumed and ranted and threatened to sue us all for abduction, burglary, and forcible entry, but in the end he married us.

Then my gang disappeared.

I looked down at Sally. She was smiling expectantly at me, and there was a funny glint in her eye that made me suspicious.

"Weren't you fooled?" I asked.

"Not for long," she grinned. She pointed to a sign tacked on the tree. It read: *No Hunting Allowed!* "I," she said, "saw that when I woke up. But I liked the way things were going, so I just kept quiet."

I picked up the time machine and put one of her hands on the hand-grip, and I took the other.

"This is the way it started," I said.

I kissed her then, and it was wonderful.

I started to kiss her again, but something happened. Light flared suddenly about us, and a streaking bolt of lightning shot between us. My hand burned, and I felt the hand-grip of the time machine growing hotter and hotter.

Sally screamed and I reached for her, but I never made it.

A black tunnel was opened up in front of me. And I was falling in. And it had no end.

I WOKE with my arm around Sally. She was awake too, and looking about with a dazed expression on her face.

We were seated on a park bench and the sun was streaming into our faces. People were passing by and they glanced at us strangely.

The men were wearing four-buttoned suits, with high celluloid collars and the women wore long dresses, with big feathered hats.

There were more carriages than automobiles moving along the broad avenue which we were facing. And the automobiles that did pass were without tops, and they coughed and sputtered asthmatically. The drivers wore goggles and long white, ankle-length coats.

I looked at Sally and she looked at me.

"Is this another gag?"

We both said it simultaneously.

Then we both shook our heads wordlessly.

This wasn't a gag.

"The time machine worked," I said hoarsely. "We are back in the past. When that lightning bolt hit it, something happened."

"Oh, Paddy," she said, "what'll we do now?"

Music was coming from down the street and I heard a sound that does to me what a fire bell does to an old fire horse.

It was the stirring, rhythmic tread of marching feet.

And then I recognized the music the band was playing. It was "Over There."

A gaily covered wagon was coming along the side of the street and behind it was a column of marching men.

On top of the wagon a piano pounding out "Over There" and a little man in a checkered suit was singing it lustily. A huge poster decorated one side of the wagon. A poster with a big picture of Uncle Sam pointing—pointing right at me! And the legend above it read: *I Want You!*

I groaned out loud and tried to pull my hair out.

"Do you get it, Sally?" I said. "Did you ever hear of the luck of the Irish? Well it's a lying outrage! I fight four

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years in Europe and now I'm back in the middle of the first World War!"

The little man had finished his song and now he was into his sales talk. He was looking right at me, as the wagon went slowly by.

"Don't be a slacker," he was yelling. "Get into the fight. Uncle Sam needs you. Join the Big Parade. Fall in behind the red-blooded Americans that are following this wagon. Don't be a slacker."

What could I do?

I stood up slowly.

"Good bye, Sally darlin'," I said. "Wait for me."

"I'll wait, Paddy," she said, starting to cry.

I kissed her once and then I marched out into the street and joined the column of men following the recruiting wagon.

I got into step and threw my shoulders back. Everyone was waving and yelling as I went by. It was wonderful.

THE END

POISON CURARE

By JON BARRY

CURARE is made from boiling down herbs. Slivers of reeds about a foot long are dipped in this mixture and become impregnated with the poison. The blow pipe is made from a reed or palm about twelve feet long. It is one tube inside another, the inner one being carefully chosen and reamed. The hunter puts a piece of rough cotton around the base of the dart and places it in the mouth piece of the pipe. The hunter sights his victim, allows for the direction and velocity of the wind, and takes careful aim. After filling his lungs to capacity he lets go an explosive blast of air that sends the dart out about one hundred feet.

The effect of the poison is most horrible. Although there is not so much pain because of a complete physical paralysis, the mind remains alert. The eyes are the only moving part and are horror-filled till the heart finally stops beating.

HARVEST DOGS

By JUNE LURIE

AMERICAN farmers harvest their own crops but some French and Italian farmers can not even find their crop without the help of trained dogs. This crop is called truffles, valuable because it brings such a high price. Truffles belong to the mushroom family, but they grow beneath the surface of the ground with no roots or green leafy parts. They are found in open woodlands where there is a great deal of lime in the soil.

Some European families have made their livings for years just by harvesting truffles. Such farmers keep packs of trained dogs to search for this buried treasure. Pigs are sometimes used in place of dogs, but pigs are quite fond of truffles and are apt to eat them before the farmer can pick them up.

* * *

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946

Of Fantastic Adventures, Published Monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1947

State of Illinois, County of Cook, ss. Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Arthur T. Pullen, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Fantastic Adventures and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily, weekly, semiweekly or triweekly newspaper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946 (section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations), printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, William B. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Editor, Raymond A. Palmer, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Managing Editor, William L. Hamling, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Business Manager, Arthur T. Pullen, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. 2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member must be given.) Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; William B. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; B. G. Davis, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; A. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; S. Davis, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. 5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is ——— (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.) A. T. PULLEN, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 25th day of September, 1947. [SEAL] GEORGE H. FISHER. (My commission expires December 17, 1950.)

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MIRACLE MAN

By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

Everyone agreed that it was impossible for Kissel to produce miracles — but he did!

Kissel pointed his finger at the gunman and an aura of force swept outward ... .

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"CALLING Dr. Burke, calling Dr. Burke. Come to shock at once, please."

Normally, the sound of his name on the hospital call system was like the clang of a fire gong to Dr. Burke. He was a busy man. Neither the resident doctors, the interns, or the nurses called him unless they really needed help. When they called for help from him, they always got it.

They didn't get it this morning. He snapped the switch of the buzz box on his desk.

"Dr. Burke speaking."

Relief sounded in the nurse's voice as she heard him answer. "Dr. Burke, we have a patient in electric shock—"

"You have patients in electric shock every morning."

The gruffness of his voice confused the nurse up there on the electro-therapy treatment ward.

"Yes, Dr. Burke. I know. But—"

"Is the patient alive?"

"Y—yes, doctor."

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"Is he in any danger?"

"N—no. That is, I don't think so. But Dr. Schultz said to call you. And the patient is acting very strange—"

"Miss Perkins, this is an insane asylum. Every patient in here acts strange. That's why they're here."

"But—"

Exasperation appeared in the doctor's voice. "If he's dying, call me. Otherwise tell Schultz to handle it. I'm busy."

Click! The buzz box on his desk went into abrupt silence as he snapped it off. He looked at it for a moment, frowning. Then he turned the master control switch to OFF.

That'll stop 'em, he thought.

Swinging his chair around to face his visitor again, he tried to smile.

Mr. Winston Clyde, political troubleshooter from the mayor's office, made no effort to conceal his irritation at the interruption. Mr. Clyde felt he was too important to have some silly nurse waste his valuable time.

"As I was saying, doctor," Mr. Clyde continued, "the escape of the six patients from the hospital places the administration in a poor light."

"They all came back or were brought back by their relatives or the police," Dr. Burke pointed out. "So no harm was done."

"But a great deal of harm was done!" Mr. Clyde refuted. "The newspapers used the escape of these patients as an excuse to attack the administration and to criticize the mayor. That cost us votes, Dr. Burke."

To Mr. Winston Clyde, any action that lost the administration votes was little short of a mortal sin. "Really, doctor," he continued, "can you offer any explanation for the escape of those six patients?"

Mr. Clyde had been sent to the city insane asylum to do two things. One of them was to jack up this doctor, to turn the heat on him, to make him realize he was a political appointee and that political appointees had better hew to the line, or else! The second thing he had been sent here to do was not something that even he could directly.

"Certainly I can offer an explanation for their escape," Dr. Burke said. "The capacity of this hospital is sixteen hundred patients. We have over twenty-five hundred here. If we had enough room to house our patients properly, and a staff big enough to handle them, they wouldn't escape."

DR. BURKE kept his voice soft. He tried to act as if he didn't know that every word he said was a bitter denunciation of the administration. He didn't voice his suspicion that money which should have gone into new hospital buildings had gone into some politician's pocket instead. He tried to give the impression that he didn't hate politicians and their stooges. He even smiled at Mr. Winston Clyde.

Mr. Clyde was not deceived. "Really, doctor, I'm afraid that explanation is not adequate. I'm afraid the mayor won't accept it."

"It will have to do," Dr. Burke answered. He was beginning to lose his temper. He kept thinking about that nurse up on electric shock. She needed him. This ape from the mayor's office was forcing him to waste valuable time that was needed elsewhere. There weren't enough hours in the day nor enough days in the week nor enough weeks in the year for Dr. Burke to do half the jobs he had to do. He was superintendent of this hospital. They had a staff of five doctors, and needed twenty. They needed scores of hospital attendants.

Dr. Burke often wondered why he stayed on this job. The pay was three

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hundred a month, plus maintenance. In private practice, he could earn three times as much. Why didn't he tell Mr. Winston Clyde to go to hell, walk out of this stuffy hole, set up his own office, and take life fairly easy? He was a psychiatrist, and a good one.

The reason he stayed was simple. The patients needed him. He could help them.

He was the kind of a man who believed that a doctor's job is to help people.

So he stayed. He could help these patients.

"I'm sorry the patients escaped," he said. "We make every effort to prevent such occurrences, but until the city hall sees fit to provide us with an adequate staff and adequate space, the blame for the escape of patients must fall where it belongs—at the door of the city hall."

He could see Mr. Clyde begin to drip icicles. This was not the proper attitude for a city employee. Definitely not. City employees had to boost the administration, not knock it. The words of this doctor were very close to treason.

"I'm afraid, doctor, we shall have to ask you to be more realistic—" Mr. Clyde began, then stopped when the door opened.

Dr. Burke looked up. His secretary stood in the door.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but there are two men out here who insist on seeing you."

"What about?"

"About a patient by the name of Desrau. The case was in the newspapers several months ago—"

"I remember," Dr. Burke answered grimly. How well he remembered! He had kicked bitterly about accepting Desrau as a patient, but his protests had been overruled.

Desrau was a murderer who had been caught red-handed in a gang killing.

He wasn't insane. He was just a killer who had the right political connections.

The fact that Desrau had been declared insane and hence not responsible for his acts was the result of a dirty political deal that drove Dr. Burke into a cold rage every time he thought of it.

"What do these men want?" he demanded.

"They say they want to see you about an examination to determine whether or not Desrau is really insane now," his secretary answered.

"Tell them nothing doing!" Dr. Burke exploded.

His secretary hastily closed the door. When he used that tone of voice, she knew to jump.

Mr. Clyde didn't know to jump. Besides, this was his second reason for coming here. He put on his most suave manner.

"Don't you—ah—think you are being a little hard on this man, doctor. After all, as I remember the case, you yourself testified he was sane. And of course if he is sane he should be released."

MR. CLYDE thought this was neatly put. He couldn't see anything objectionable in anything he had said. And, of course, it completely concealed his real motive. Or he thought it did. Then the doctor spoke.

"Have you got an interest in having Desrau discharged?" Dr. Burke demanded.

"Oh, no," Clyde hastily denied. "I have no interest in it whatsoever. Except to see justice done, of course."

The physician eyed the political stooge.

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"I think you're a liar," he said.

Clyde's face began to turn red. "This is an outrage," he said.

"I think your real reason for coming here was to put me in a hole because of the escape of those six patients and then hint that a good way to get out of that hole would be to release Desrau," Dr. Burke said.

This was exactly the truth, but Mr. Winston Clyde had no intention of admitting it. "I had no such thought in mind!" he shouted. "I had completely forgotten that such a person as Desrau existed until I heard his name mentioned in this office. Then I recalled the case. But no little dime a dozen sawbones is going to—"

Dr. Burke rose quietly to his feet. He planned to give himself the satisfaction of throwing Mr. Winston Clyde down the front steps of the hospital building. And if they didn't like it down at city hall, they could damned well lump it.

The back door of his office was jerked open. Clad in a white gown, his red hair rumpled and awry, his horn-rimmed glasses on crooked, youthful Dr. Edmund Schultz burst into the room.

"Dr. Burke—" he began.

Then he realized the superintendent was not alone.

"Sorry," he apologized. "I didn't know you were busy but I couldn't get through on the buzz box—"

Schultz was a good man, as good as they ever came. He was young, but he already knew more about the functioning of the human mind than most college professors. And he was earnest and sincere, qualities which Dr. Burke liked.

He was scared now. His face was white. And his eyes were the eyes of a man who has seen miracles and doesn't know whether he likes it or not.

"Kissel's gone!" he said.

"What?" Dr. Burke said. For a moment, he did not remember who Kissel was. His memory was not equal to the task of instantaneously sorting over twenty-five hundred patients and picking out the one named Kissel. "You mean, he has escaped?"

Schultz nodded vigorously. "I don't think he's out of the building yet but he walked right out of electric shock."

"And you let him do it?" Dr. Burke gasped.

"*Let him?*" Schultz hotly defended. "There were four attendants and a nurse and myself in therapy. All six of us couldn't stop him. We tried—"

There was a dazed and startled look in the eyes of the young doctor, the look of a man who has seen miracles.

"The nurse tried to call you," he continued.

Then Dr. Burke remembered the call from the nurse and simultaneously he remembered Kissel, a little schizophrenic bookkeeper, a shy, timid, scared-of-his-own-shadow little man who weighed about 130 pounds and had the muscular development of a sparrow.

THE idea that Dr. Schultz aided by four muscular hospital attendants and a nurse couldn't stop Kissel was so preposterous it was unbelievable. A twelve-year-old boy could hold the little bookkeeper down for a week, presuming Kissel somehow found the courage to resist, which was a big presumption. Kissel didn't have the courage to swat a fly.

"Come on," Dr. Burke said. "We've got to find him before he gets out of the hospital."

He had forgotten all about Mr. Winston Clyde.

"I'll say you have to find him!"

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Clyde spoke. The man was grinning. "What I didn't have time to mention, doctor—and I'm quoting the mayor now—is this: if another inmate escapes from this hospital, we'll be looking for another superintendent, for somebody who can convince the public he can protect them from the danger of escaping madmen."

For an instant, Dr. Burke hesitated, deciding whether or not he would give himself the satisfaction of throwing this man down the front steps of the hospital. Then he recognized the threat posed by Clyde. If he tossed Clyde down the hospital steps, the politicians would certainly get him. There would be another superintendent. And what would the patients who needed him do?

"We'll find him all right," Burke gruffly said.

"I'm sure you will," Clyde grinned. "I'll just go along with you to make certain the job is done right."

Burke hesitated again, then shrugged. Clyde was obviously looking for something that could be used to put pressure on him. But so what? He wasn't afraid of anything any damned political stooge could find anywhere in this hospital. He led the way to the self-service elevator that would take them up to the electrotherapy ward.

Schultz pulled at his sleeve. "You haven't heard all of it," he whispered.

For the first time, Dr. Burke realized that Schultz was trembling. All blood had drained out of the youthful physician's face. He looked like a man who has seen the earth open and the devil himself come walking up out of hell.

"What's the matter with you?" Burke spoke sharply.

"Kissel—" Schultz whispered, with an eye on Mr. Winston Clyde. "Kissel has gone crazy."

"Of course he's crazy," Burke said. "That's why he's here."

"I didn't mean that," Schultz answered. "He *was* crazy. Now he's *crazy* crazy."

"What the devil do you mean?" Burke demanded.

Schultz rubbed sweat from his forehead. "I don't know what I mean," he answered.

The self-service elevator rose from the basement and stopped at their floor. They opened the doors and entered. Dr. Burke punched the button for the third floor. Schultz said nothing more as the elevator carried them upward. When it stopped automatically on the third floor, Dr. Burke got his first glimpse of the meaning Schultz had been trying to put into the words *crazy* crazy.

Miss Perkins, the nurse on the electro-therapy ward, was waiting for the elevator. She had been trying frantically to summon the elevator and when it stopped on her floor, she thought it had come in response to her pushing of the button.

Before the three men could get out of the elevator, she had jerked open the doors and had dived headfirst into the cage.

Miss Perkins was a prim and prissy old maid whose secret hope, expressed as a fear, was of being pursued by men who might attack her.

She dived into the elevator.

She was stark naked.

THE only vestige of clothing was a pair of spectacles perched high and awry on her nose. Even her shoes were missing. Every muscle on her thin body stood out in stark relief.

Dr. Burke stared at her. In the years he had spent in charge of an insane asylum, he had seen many things, but he had never seen anything equal to the sight of Miss Perkins without any clothes on. Oddly, there was nothing

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even remotely humorous in the sight. It was sheer tragedy, especially to the nurse. Frightened half to death, she was suffering agonies of humiliation.

She was completely inside the elevator before she realized it had not come in response to her frantic pushing of the signal button but had risen to the floor to bring a load of passengers.

At the same time she realized the passengers were males.

"Men!" she gasped.

Whirling like a dervish, she turned and fought her way out of the elevator and started at a run across the entrance hall toward the open door of the electro-therapy treatment ward.

She stopped before she got to the open door.

"I can't go in there," she wailed. "*He's* in there."

Turning, she ran back toward the elevator.

Winston Clyde laughed. Schultz and Burke, realizing the stark tragedy being enacted before their startled eyes, were grimly silent.

The nurse recognized Dr. Burke. She flew to his arms.

"*He*—he pointed a finger at me," she sobbed hysterically. "*He* said, 'Clothes off.' And there I stood without a stitch on. *Without a stitch!* I'm a respectable girl, Dr. Burke. I don't do things like this."

"Who did what?" Burke questioned.

"*He* did it."

"And who is he?"

"That little patient. The one who took electric shock this morning. Kissel."

"Then he didn't escape?"

"No, Dr. Burke. He just left the treatment rooms. He came back."

"And he took your clothes off?"

She nodded vigorously.

"There, there, Miss Perkins," Burke soothed. "Everything will be all right. You go back to your room and get yourself some clothes. Dr. Schultz—"

Schultz was already taking off his white gown. The two doctors wrapped it around the nurse, bundled her into the elevator, closed the door. She pushed the button and the cage dropped out of sight.

They looked at each other.

They could hear the uproar coming from the treatment ward.

"He's back," Schultz said. He didn't sound pleased or relieved.

"I told you he was crazy crazy."

"Do you mean to tell me you think he took her clothes off?" Burke questioned. "You would need a regiment to hold her if you just wanted to take off one of her shoes. There are not enough men in this hospital to hold her while somebody took off all her clothes."

He had profound convictions concerning Miss Perkins.

"Just the same, he did it," Schultz stubbornly insisted.

"Nonsense!" Burke blurted out. But he didn't feel too sure of himself.

"Interesting sights you have here in this hospital," Mr. Winston Clyde spoke, glancing down the elevator shaft.

The door to the electro-therapy ward was open. Dr. Burke assumed that Miss Perkins, in her haste to get out of the ward, had forgotten to close it. Doors in an insane asylum were always kept locked.

Through the open door they could hear the uproar coming from the ward.

They entered the ward. The spring lock clicked as Dr. Burke closed the door behind them.

A LONG hallway ran down the center of the ward. At the far end a locked door opened on to a corridor

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which led to the wards where the semi-violent patients were quartered.

At the right of the ward were doors opening into the rooms where hydro-therapy treatments were given. Big bath tubs were in those rooms, tubs where a patient could soak in hot water for hours, or in cold water, as the case required. There were facilities for subjecting patients undergoing treatment to sudden needle-sharp freezing sprays. Hydro-therapy, treatment by the use of water.

On the left was the electro-therapy ward. Electro-therapy, treatment by electricity. The electric shock equipment was in there. In receiving electric shock treatment two electrodes were clamped on the temple of the patient and current at approximately 110 volts and three-fifths of an ampere was fed to the electrodes for about two-fifths of a second. The result was instant and painless unconsciousness. The patient did not feel the current hit him, nor did he ever remember it. The electricity flowing through his brain knocked him out. It also did something to his mind. What it did, even the best psychiatrists in the field did not know for certain, but sometimes the schizophrenic* patient showed marked improvement after treatment by electric shock.

Kissel was a schizophrenic.

Four attendants, a nurse, and a doctor, were always in attendance in the electro-therapy ward when treatments were being given.

As soon as they entered the hallway between the two wards, Dr. Burke saw the four attendants.

Like four statues, they were standing against the wall on the left.

"What are you men doing there?" Burke demanded.

They looked at him. They didn't answer.

"Where's Kissel?" he spoke again.

They rolled their eyes down the hallway but said nothing.

"What's the matter with you men?" Burke sharply demanded.

He knew these four attendants. They had been employed for years in the hospital.

When they continued to stand against the wall and did not answer, he reached out and grabbed the nearest one by the shoulder, yanked him away from the wall. The dazed physician somehow thought the man might be tied to the wall.

The attendant wasn't tied. Or not tied in any way known to science. Burke pulled him away from the wall easily enough. But the man violently struck the doctor's hand from his shoulder and leaped back against the wall.

BURKE stared in amazement at the man. He had seen many men do strange things but he had never seen any man do anything stranger than this.

"Hello, Dr. Burke," a voice spoke down the hall, calling his attention away from the attendant.

It was Kissel who had spoken. Kissel had come out of one of the electro-therapy rooms.

A dozen or more patients were following him.

It was the babble of their voices that

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*SCHIZOPHRENIA:—*A mental disease characterized by a split personality or a withdrawal from reality. The schizophrenic often withdraws from the world around him and lives in a dream world of his own, a world of phantasy from which eventually he can be aroused only with the greatest difficulty if at all.—Ed.*

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Burke and Schultz had heard when they got off the elevator.

"Then he hasn't escaped," Burke heard Schultz whisper. "Yet."

Kissel, the patients following him, trotted down the hall toward Dr. Burke.

Something had happened to Kissel. It showed in his walk, in his bearing, in his manner.

Burke remembered Kissel as a timid, stooped, shy little rabbit of a man, a born bookkeeper who was afraid of his own shadow. Before he had been brought to the hospital, Kissel had lived in fright and fear, trembling and cringing along the streets, afraid of every alley, of every corner, scared of the clouds in the sky—lightning might strike from them—frightened by the wind—it might blow over a building on him—terrified by the rain—he might get wet and catch pneumonia. He had been scared to death of automobiles. Trains drove him to a frenzy of fear. Even long and intensive therapy had resulted in little or no improvement.

This was Kissel as Dr. Burke remembered him, the little rabbit man.

This was Kissel no longer.

The patient coming quickly down the hall toward them walked in majesty instead of scuttling in fear. There was no fear visible in him. None anywhere. His step was firm, he walked erect, the stoop was gone from his back, his chin was up.

The thin hospital nightgown he wore was the robe of a king.

"What on earth has happened to him?" Burke whispered.

"That's what I want to know," Schultz answered.

Kissel stopped in front of the doctor. There was a smile on his face. The patients clustered behind him like baby chicks behind a mother hen.

"Hello, Dr. Burke," Kissel said. "You were wondering about these men?"

He pointed toward the four attendants standing like statues against the wall.

"Y—yes. As a matter of fact, I *was* wondering about them," the doctor answered.

"I told them to stand there," Kissel said.

He smiled and made a little gesture with his hands, a gesture which said he had told the four men to stand against the wall and that was all there was to it.

"You—." The meaning of Kissel's words sank slowly into Dr. Burke's mind. Kissel had told the four attendants to stand against the wall. And they stood there! That was all there was to it.

The doctor's throat was suddenly dry.

Kissel nodded. "I'll let them move, after a while," he said. "But not right now. You see, Dr. Schultz thought I had escaped and he went looking for you. But I hadn't escaped. I had just hid in a closet for a while, to think. Then when I came out of the closet, the nurse saw me—"

"Miss Perkins?" Burke questioned.

"Yes," Kissel said. "She told me to go back to bed. But I didn't want to go back to bed. So she said she would have the attendants put the leg straps on me—"

"Then what happened?" Burke whispered.

"She was being a nuisance so I took her clothes off," Kissel answered. "I didn't want to hurt her: I just wanted her to go away and leave me alone. I didn't think she would stay very long if she didn't have any clothes on—"

"She didn't, either," Dr. Burke choked out the words.

"Then the attendants tried to re-

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strain me and I had to tell them to stand against the wall," Kissel continued. "I had some things to do and they were bothering me—"

"What did you have to do?" Burke asked.

"I had some sick people to cure," the little man promptly answered. He turned his head and grinned at the patients clustered around behind him. "These people were sick. They wanted to get well. I could cure them if I wasn't bothered too much—"

HE SPOKE so softly and so convincingly that Dr. Burke had to hastily remind himself that this was the vagary of an insane mind. Kissel thought he had cured these patients!

He thought he had succeeded where the staff of doctors at the hospital had failed.

No wonder Schultz had thought he was crazy crazy!

"So I cured them," Kissel said. "They're all ready for discharge now. If you will only unlock the door, so they can go down to the discharge ward, they can all be ready to go home this afternoon."

Cure them! Burke thought. Medical science knew no way to cure them, no certain way. The best doctors on earth could sometimes help them, and often couldn't, but the doctors always thought they had worked a miracle when they cured one of these patients. For every success, they had ten failures.

"If you will please unlock the door—" Kissel said.

Dr. Burke shook his head. He was very gentle, he was very kind. "I'm afraid we can't do that," he said.

"But they're cured," Kissel protested.

"I'm afraid we're not certain of that," Burke gently responded.

"I'm certain of it," Kissel said. There was a faint frown on his face. Behind him, the patients were silent. They watched and listened and said nothing. Kissel spoke for them and they seemed to feel they had an adequate champion.

Kissel looked at Burke out of the keenest pair of blue eyes the doctor had ever seen.

"You're a good fellow, Dr. Burke," the little man said. "You're one of the best. We know you, Dr. Burke. We know you very well. You always try to do what's right and you're always around looking after your patients, seeing they are getting proper care, seeing they are being well treated. So I'm not going to tell you to stand against the wall. I'm just going to ask you and Dr. Schultz and this man—" The keen eyes were fixed for an instant on Winston Clyde— "to stand to one side."

Dr. Burke stood to one side. Schultz and Clyde took a few quiet steps and stood beside him.

Never afterward would the physician remember exactly how this happened He wasn't pushed, he wasn't shoved. He seemed to move of his own accord. This happened in spite of the fact that he definitely knew he had no conscious intention of standing to one side. He stood to one side just the same.

Kissel waved at the patients behind him, waved and grinned.

"Come on," he said.

He walked toward the door.

The patients followed him.

The children who followed the Pied Piper did not go half so willingly or half so rapturously as did the patients who followed Kissel. They trotted right behind him. They talked to each other and laughed softly. The sound of their soft laughter filled the big hallway. It was a good sound, that laughter, in an insane asylum, where men laughed crazily, for no apparent rea-

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son, the sound of this soft, happy laughter was especially good. Hearing it, Dr. Burke marveled.

Kissel stopped in front of the locked door.

Dr. Burke felt sorry for them. Here, in front of a locked door, Kissel's illusion went smash before his eyes. Kissel had no key to this door. He couldn't open it. And with his inability to open the door, his hallucination that he had cured these patients following behind him would burst like a soap bubble.

KISSEL looked around at the patients. They were his friends, these people. He was trying to help them. He would help them, if he could. But he couldn't. This was the blind leading the blind. Or so Dr. Burke thought.

"Come on," Kissel said.

He pointed his index finger at the door.

"Open, door," he ordered.

The words sounded like a command, like an order from someone in authority, from someone who had power and who knew how to use it.

And the door opened.

The lock clicked as though an invisible key had been turned. As though pushed by unseen hands, the door swung open.

Kissel walked through the open door.

The patients trooped after him.

A spider with a thousand ice-cold feet walked up Dr. Burke's spine.

"Open sesame!" he heard the dazed Dr. Schultz whisper. *"Open sesame!"*

Schultz giggled then. He sounded silly. And he looked like he was scared right down to the bottom of his shoes.

A simple thing had happened. A door had opened. A man and a group of patients had gone through the open door.

But the door had been locked and it had opened not to a key but to a command.

Dr. Burke could feel sweat on his face, he could feel it under his arms, he could feel it on the palms of his hands. He tried to think but his mind was refusing the evidence of his senses.

Winston Clyde stared uncomprehendingly at the last of the patients going out the door. He had no conception whatever of the thing that had happened right before his eyes. He thought somebody—probably Dr. Burke—was playing a trick on him.

"I hope I don't need to remind you of what will happen if you let those patients escape," he said venomously.

"You go to hell!" Dr. Burke whispered. He could hear Kissel talking to the patients out in the hall. Kissel was telling them to go down the ramps and not to use the elevators.

"Nobody will stop you as you leave," Kissel finished. "Go on back to your homes and start life all over again. You're cured, you're well, you're not sick any longer."

Burke heard the chorus of voices thanking Kissel. Then he heard the patients begin to scamper down the ramps. The sound of their steps clattered through the hall.

Then Kissel came back into the hall.

"They're gone," he said. "Gone back home. The attendants on the lower floors won't be able to stop them, either."

He sounded very happy.

Then he noticed the attendants standing against the wall. A shadow crossed his face.

"You men are free now," he said.

For a second, the four attendants stared at him. Then the nearest one stepped away from the wall and the other three followed. They made no effort to molest Kissel. They stared

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at him as though they could not tear their gaze away from his face. Fear was in their eyes, and something beyond fear—awe.

Kissel rubbed his hands together. He turned to Burke.

"And now, doctor, what patient would you like me to cure next?"

"Eh?" the startled physician gasped. He was in a daze. Pressures had been accumulating too fast for his mind to dispose of them. First, there had been Clyde, and his threats, then there had been the two men wanting to see him about Desrau, then Schultz had come bursting into his office saying that Kissel had gone crazy crazy. All of these things had been pressures. Then there had been Miss Perkins, gibbering and naked as she lunged into the elevator. Then there had been the four attendants stand against the wall like four statues, then Kissel, and then the door that had opened. That had been terrific pressure, that door. How had it opened? Had Kissel opened the door merely by ordering it to open?

If that had happened—

BURKE felt mentally fuzzy. His mind, normally a keen instrument, had been dulled by too many pressures. He kept telling himself that this was some trick, some stunt. He knew how exceedingly clever the insane mind can often be. He told himself that Kissel was tricking him. This was the only explanation that fitted his conception of an ordered universe.

Doors don't open to a command.

"What—what did you say?" Burke parroted. "Did—did you ask me what patient I wanted you to cure next?"

Kissel beamed. "Exactly," he said. "You choose the next patient. Pick a hard one. Pick somebody who needs help—"

This must stop, Burke thought. This has gone far enough. Kissel will be in a frenzy if he isn't stopped soon. We'll never cure him if we let him go much longer.

"Sorry, Kissel," he said, aloud. "But it's time for you to go back to your room."

Beside him, Schultz gasped in protest. But Burke's everyday mind was back on the job and he would not listen.

"You have to go back to your room now," he repeated.

Kissel's face lost its happy smile. He looked a little bewildered. "Doctor—" he began.

Burke shook his head. This was over, this was finished, this was done. He didn't know how that opening door had been accomplished, but this was done. He looked at the four waiting attendants.

"Take this patient back to his room and put him in pack*," he ordered.

"Please," Kissel begged.

"I'm doing it to help you," Burke said.

"But—"

"Don't be rough with him," the doctor said to the attendants. "But take him back to his room."

Deep in his heart, Burke was a very kind and gentle person. Even now, as distracted and upset as he was, he remembered to order the attendants to be gentle.

"Don't do it!" Kissel begged.

The attendants hesitated. Burke overrode their hesitation. "Take him back to his room," he ordered.

Burke was their boss. They were accustomed to obeying him. They obeyed him now. They started toward Kissel.

**PACK—A patient put in pack is wrapped in ice-cold wet sheets, then in blankets, and is strapped in bed.—Ed.*

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The little man pointed his finger at them.

"Stand against the wall!" he said.

For a moment, the four men seemed bewildered. They had received conflicting orders and they didn't know which to obey. For a second they were in doubt.

Then they knew which order to obey.

They stepped to the wall, stood with their backs against it, stood like four statues.

Burke stared at them. His mind was still fuzzy. He still doubted the evidence of his own eyes. Somehow it seemed to him that the only possible explanation for the action of these four men was that they were deliberately disobeying him. In that case, he knew what to do.

"All right," he said. "I'll take him back to his room myself."

He turned to the little bookkeeper. "Come, Kissel—"

Kissel shook his head. "I like you Dr. Burke," he said. "Because I like you, I will not harm you. But—"

The pointing finger came up, centered on the doctor's chest.

"You only move half as fast as normal, Dr. Burke," Kissel said. "You can't move nearly fast enough to catch me."

The little man chuckled at his own cleverness. He had thought of a way out of his dilemma, a way to keep Burke from molesting him, and at the same time a way that did not harm the well-liked doctor.

DR. BURKE felt his muscular reactions slow. His muscles still obeyed his will but they obeyed it slowly, at a strange half-time rate. He suddenly felt like a man in a slow-motion moving picture.

It was at this point that something deep in his mind recognized the existence of a miracle.

He was a tough-minded skeptic, was this doctor, but his conscious mind was finally forced to admit the existence of the miraculous. It had happened—*to him.*

He looked at Kissel with new eyes. For the first time he fully realized how all fear had gone out of the little bookkeeper, how the bent shoulders had lifted, how the stooped back had straightened. Something had taken the fear and the fright out of this man. He walked unafraid, where once he had cringed, a morose and frightened mouse that had turned into a happy lion.

What had happened to Kissel? What was the source of this miraculous power that flowed through him, this power that enabled him to open locked doors, this power that unwilling men obeyed?

Chuckling, Kissel beckoned to them to follow him. Dazedly, Burke and Schultz and Clyde followed him. He went to the far end of the ward. And the locked door there opened to his pointing finger and to his command.

He crossed the little hall and started toward the semi-violent ward. The nurse on duty in the little hall looked up but seeing Dr. Burke, made no effort to stop them. They entered the ward. At the far end was another door, a door that opened into the criminal ward, but Kissel did not go there. He glanced at Burke.

"Since you wouldn't select the patient you wanted cured, I made the selection," he said.

A patient was lying on the first bed. Dr. Burke knew this patient. George Carson, a manic-depressive case. He had long periods of depression when he was sullen and withdrawn, when he would speak to no one, but sat on his bed and brooded in silence. Then, when the manic phase hit him, he raged in violent fury and had to be wrapped

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in wet sheets and tied in bed.

Dr. Burke had tried to cure this man, and had failed.

Carson, lying on his bed and unaware of anything happening around him, was in the depressive phase of his illness.

Kissel beamed at him.

"Wake up," he said.

Dr. Burke held his breath.

As though awakening from a drugged sleep, the patient stirred. He sat up in bed.

Kissel smiled fondly at him. "I am your friend," that smile said. "I am your brother."

The finger pointed. "Get up and walk," Kissel said. "You're well again. You're cured. Get up and walk."

The words stirred strange memories in Burke's mind. Where had he heard these, or similar words, before? He couldn't remember.

HE SAW a change come over George Carson. Carson grinned a little, echoing Kissel's happy smile. He stretched his body, yawning like an awakening sleeper, then put one foot over the edge of the bed. He stepped down to the floor, stood teetering for a second, took one tentative step, then a second.

"He's walking!" Burke heard Schultz whisper fiercely. "I tell you this is a miracle—"

Burke had already accepted this fact. "I know it is," he answered, wondering awe in his voice. "But where did he get the power to work miracles and what is that power?"

"What do you think I've been going crazy trying to understand?" Schultz answered hotly.

Burke was wondering where he had heard the words Kissel had used. Then his mind made the connection and he remembered. *"Take up thy bed and walk!"*

In essence, this was what Kissel had said. And the words came straight from the New Testament.

And the patient walked. In response to Kissel's command, George Carson got up out of bed, he came out of the depressive phase from which nothing known to medical science could really rouse him, he got up out of bed and walked. His face lighted. An eager awareness suddenly showed in his eyes. The terrific depression was gone from his mind. He was a man again, alert, intelligent, and alive.

Kissel beamed at him.

Boom! Boom, boom!

Somewhere in the hospital three sharp sounds rang out.

Kissel turned to Burke. "I cured him, doctor," he said. "He's well again."

"I know it," Burke whispered. "But, in heaven's name, how did you do it?"

A little frown appeared on Kissel's face. "I don't exactly know how," he answered. "But we'll work it out, you and I and Dr. Schultz. We'll find out how I did it. Then you can do it."

The frown faded into a happy smile. "Anybody can do it. We'll empty these beds, you and I and the men who will come to us for training. We'll find out how I do it and then we'll empty the hospitals—"

It was no little dream this man dreamed, it was no little vision that moved in his mind.

"We'll empty the hospitals of the world, Dr. Burke—"

On his face, the vision grew. The sick, the halt, the lame, and the blind, the patients in all the insane asylums of the world, in all the bedlams of the earth, were included in Kissel's dream. The cripples would walk again and sick men would rise up from their beds and clouded minds would be made clear, these things were a part of this little

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bookkeeper's vision, were included his personal shape of things to come.

On his face was ecstatic happiness. Beside him, George Carson, manic-depressive no longer, stood clear-eyed as proof that Kissel could work his miracles.

"We'll cure the man in the next bed," Kissel said. "You and Dr. Schultz watch closely now. I'll tell you exactly what I am doing as I do it. You'll soon catch the secret. It's really nothing but intense concentration and faith—"

He turned to the patient in the next bed.

Boom!

The lock on the door at the far end of the ward shattered. The door was kicked open. Three men came hurriedly through. They carried pistols in their hands.

One of the men was Desrau.

They stopped long enough to slam the door and to shove a bed against it. Then they came running down the ward.

Dr. Burke realized what was happening. "Don't try to stop them!" he shouted. "Stand aside and let them pass."

As he spoke, he shoved Schultz out of the way.

KISSEL did not move. He remained in the aisle between the two rows of beds. He saw the three men coming toward him. There was a puzzled, bewildered smile on his face.

Desrau was short and squat, with wide shoulders and a flat face. His cheeks were rough with a black stubble.

"You mustn't do this," Kissel said to the killer. "Really, you mustn't."

"Get out of th' way!" Desrau answered. To him, Kissel was just a patient in a hospital nightgown. He stayed too long in this hospital to have any liking for patients, for nurses, attendants, interns, or doctors. Especially he disliked patients. He had had to live with them.

"Get out of th' way!" he snarled.

Kissel remained in the aisle.

"But you mustn't do this," he repeated. "Wait until I cure you—"

"No, Kissel!" Burke shouted. "No! Let them go."

Burke started forward. The fatal slowness held him. He didn't get there in time.

The pistol in Desrau's hand came up. And came down again in a savage blow that struck Kissel on the head.

The little man stumbled backward, fell against the end of the bed, half caught himself then slid to a sitting position on the floor.

Desrau and his two companions hurried past him.

One of the men with Desrau turned surprised eyes on Mr. Winston Clyde.

"You dirty double-crosser!" he said. "You didn't get the job done. So we had to do it this way."

Clyde, his face white, hastily lifted his hands and backed against the wall.

Desrau and his two companions hurried down the ward.

"Unlock this door!" they ordered. The attendant on duty there looked at Dr. Burke, then hastily fumbled for his keys.

Sitting on the floor in the aisle, Kissel looked at the three men. There was a dazed expression on his face. The smile had gone. A sad bitterness had replaced it.

His arm came up.

His finger pointed.

The pointing finger was aimed squarely as Desrau.

"Heart stop!" Kissel said.

As he spoke, a shiver passed over the burly killer. He turned his head, looked over his shoulder. His teeth were bared in a fighting snarl. Something had hap-

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pened to him then. He didn't know what.

FOR a period of thirty seconds he snarled back over his shoulder like a murderous beast at bay. Then his knees began to buckle. He fell. Catching himself on his hands, he squatted for an instant on his hands and knees. He slid face downward on the floor.

His two companions stared in consternation at him.

"Get up!" one of them said. "Des! Get up. We've got to get out of here."

"He'll never get up," Kissel whispered. "Not ever."

His finger pointed again.

"Drop gun!" he said.

One man dropped his weapon.

The finger pointed again, at the second man.

"Drop gun," Kissel repeated.

The second pistol clattered to the floor.

"Just stand there and don't move," Kissel spoke.

The two men stood like statues.

Kissel's voice had grown weaker. He coughed as he spoke. Schultz beat Burke to him. Schultz caught him in his arms as he slipped down to the floor.

Burke could see the splinters of bone on Kissel's scalp where the barrel of the pistol had struck. He dropped to his knees.

Kissel smiled at him.

"You tried to help me, didn't you?" he whispered. "That was like you, always trying to help somebody."

His voice faltered, for an instant his eyes closed. Then they opened again.

"Great things are going to happen to you," Burke heard the little man whisper to him.

Kissel turned, looked at Mr. Winston Clyde. Slowly his finger pointed. He spoke to Clyde. "Aren't great things going to happen to Dr. Burke? Aren't they now?"

Clyde swallowed. He nodded.

"You'll see, doc—" Kissel whispered. "You'll see—"

He died.

He could work miracles, on anybody but himself.

In that hushed and silent ward, Dr. Burke thought he could hear the whisper of wings as Kissel died.

THEY were real miracles that Kissel had worked, Dr. Burke fully realized in the days that followed. His realization grew when he completed his examination of George Carson. Carson was a cured man.

Burke discharged him from the hospital.

His realization and his wonder at the miracles Kissel had worked grew still more when he examined the patients Kissel had released from the electro-therapy treatment ward.

They, too, were cured.

He discharged them from the hospital too.

"He would have emptied every bed in this hospital," Schultz moaned. "If he had had time. He could work miracles."

Dr. Burke sadly agreed. He agreed even more fervently when Mr. Clyde went back to the city hall and made his report. What happened down there, Burke did not know, but suddenly the administration was willing to erect all the buildings he desperately needed, floating a bond issue to pay for them, and to give him all the staff he needed. With his knowledge of the working of city politics, Burke considered this a miracle completely beyond the understanding of man.

What was the source of the little man's strange power to work miracles?

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Neither Burke nor Schultz know for sure, but Schultz has ideas on the subject. Kissel had received electric shock treatment. Schultz thinks the current flowing through his brain did something to him. He thinks the current changed his mind around somehow, giving him the power of mind over matter, bringing into existence in Kissel a power that is latent in every human being but is only realized once in a millenium. Schultz thinks one other person had that power two thousand years ago. He thinks Kissel had the same power for a little while.

Poor Schultz! He knows that something in the electric shock machine gave Kissel the power to work miracles. He knows the secret is in there, somewhere. Day and night he works with this equipment, checking it, testing it, trying to discover what it did to Kissel. He knows the secret is in there, but he hasn't been able to find it. He's gotten hints, but only hints.

Every spare minute he has, Dr. Burke goes up to electric shock and helps Schultz hunt. If they could only solve the secret of the power they once saw at work, if they could only rouse the latent energy that *must* exist somewhere in every human mind—

The world could use miracles. And more miracles.

GHOST SUPERSTITIONS

★ By FRANCES YERXA ★

A DOG howling in the night is thought to be a sign of evil or a death in the family. A bird flying in the window may bring misfortune with it. It is said that to watch a funeral procession is inviting the same calamity to visit you. This superstition was born from the idea that the ghost of the departed is in the cortège and is likely to entice one's soul away. The ancients believed that one's soul, unfortunately, was in the habit of leaving its owner's body from time to time, and that death was a permanent, instead of a temporary departure of the soul.

Many years ago in some parts of Europe the tiles were removed from the roofs at the time of a death, or if one of the family was extremely ill. This was done to allow the soul to depart more easily so that the agonies of a lingering death could be avoided. The Chinese used to make holes in their roofs for this reason. Others simply open the window as the person expires and then close it immediately so that the spirit will not be tempted to return and annoy the survivors. A bird was symbolic of the soul for they thought that the spirit flew out of its discarded body. No doubt that is why a bird flying in a window is a bad omen. Perhaps they thought that the bird was there to carry the soul away or to tempt it to leave its body.

Primitive man thought of life after death as being very unpleasant, and decided that the departed souls would be jealous of the living. That is why they were considered mischievous and not to be trusted. Even the most devoted mother might become so degenerate with envy that she would deliberately harm her own child. A person having an untimely death was more apt to plague his survivors. This is why the savages thought it was a crime to commit murder. Not out of respect for the Ten Commandments, but due to the fact that a killing would be followed by visitations of evil and harm to the community. The savages of some localities thought it even dangerous to kill a tree or an animal and performed elaborate ceremonies to propitiate the spirit he had made incarnate, so think of the fear they must have had when killing a man. They expected the ghost to haunt the entire village and destroy their homes. The murderer is committing a crime against his neighbors by imperiling their lives.

SEVERAL methods have been devised to fool the ghost. Corpses are carried out feet first so that their spirits cannot see their way back in. In some countries it was the custom to tell the bees when a death occurred. Some member of the family would go to the hives and knock to attract the attention of the bees and then whisper the information that the owner has passed away and in some cases they tell the bees who their next owner will be so that they will not be enticed away by the spirit of their former owner. Sometimes crepe is hung over the hives. In some parts of France it was the custom to hang crepe on the trees, cats, livestock, even on the pigsties.

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The custom of wailing at funerals has been one of the most widespread practices. Of course we all express our grief and emotions by tears at the loss of a loved one, but the more savage people went to extremes. They would howl and scream not only in the presence of the corpse, but on definite occasions over a long period of time. They would cut themselves, pull out their hair, and tear off their garments. It was a planned ritual, not uncontrolled emotion. It was often the custom to hire mourners to set up the necessary wails. These wails were all in the same rhythm until it has come down to present day known as the dirge. Their subject matter was all about the same. The sentences were addressed to the ghost, first telling him of their grief, then praising and sympathizing with the one whose death was so untimely, and last a plea that the spirit should go to the place set aside for it and not remain behind to haunt the living.

They felt that ghosts had the power of looking into people's minds and finding the secret thoughts there. As they believed that no one ever died a natural death, they felt that the ghost would hold resentment against the person who brought about his passing. So they performed elaborate mourning ceremonies to convince the ghost that they were truly grief-stricken, and that far from wishing him dead, they had done everything in their power to prevent it. This belief led to wearing black as a disguise and as a symbol of grief. The widow usually wore a black veil to deceive the ghost. In some countries, the widow would merely wear her clothes wrong side out.

Until the last few years it was the custom in India and in China for the widows to throw themselves upon the funeral pyres of their husbands. This was not done as a precaution against being haunted, but because they believed that their husbands would need them, as always, in the spirit world. Way back in early Egyptian history it was the custom not only to kill the wives, but also the slaves and favorite animals of the more important men in order for them to care for him in the next world. Food, clothing, jewelry and accessories have been found in the ancient tombs. In savage tribes, a chief who wished to communicate with his dead relatives simply gave the message to a human being and then killed him, sending him off into the next world.

* * *

ANTS ARE BOOZERS

☆ By A. MORRIS ☆

THERE is a small yellow-colored beetle that is the equivalent to a walking still to the ant colonies. The ants do not realize that this insect is their enemy and does not have their best interests at heart. The only thing that the ants care about is the sweet liquor that flows from the hairs on the beetle's back. They follow him around and keep taking just one more drink until they begin to see double, and then fall by the wayside to sleep it off. The beetle knows that sleeping ants can do no harm, so she takes advantage of the situation and slips into the chambers of the ant city and starts her villainous plunder. She eats or destroys all the ant eggs and lays her own eggs in their nurseries. She knows the ants will generously hatch and care for her babies, thus relieving her of her maternal duties. There is another bug that is even more bold that sets her still up just outside the ant city. She too knows how weak-willed even an ant is when it comes to drink. Whenever this beetle is meat hungry and is ready for business, she sprinkles the air with such an odor that it causes the ants to stop in their tracks. Soon the ants beat a track to the very door of her still. A one-way track because this beetle is cannibalistic and the ants never return to their own city.

HINDOO JAUNDICE CURE

☆ By PETE BOGG ☆

THE Hindoos had an elaborate ceremony to cure jaundice. The idea was to banish the patient's yellow color to yellow things such as the sun, where it belongs, and to get for the patient a healthy red color from a living, virile source such as a red bull. They call a priest who recites a spell about sending all your heartaches and jaundice up into the sun, and asks that you be enveloped in the color of a red bull. While the priest is chanting, the patient is sipping water which contains red bull's hairs and has been poured over the bull's neck. Then the patient is smeared from head to foot with a yellow porridge made of tumeric, and he is placed on a bed which has three yellow birds tied to it. Then the priest pours water over the patient to wash off the yellow porridge, assuming that the jaundice will wash off too and go into the yellow birds.

There is a bird called the "stone curlew" which is said to have the power to cure jaundice simply by looking at the patient. The bird has such large golden eyes and seems to draw the disease from the person light a stream through his eyesight. Anyone who was fortunate enough to own one of these stone curlews kept it under cover so that it could not look at a jaundiced person and cure him for nothing.

* * *

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THEY BURIED HER BODY

by GORDON PHILIP ENGLAND

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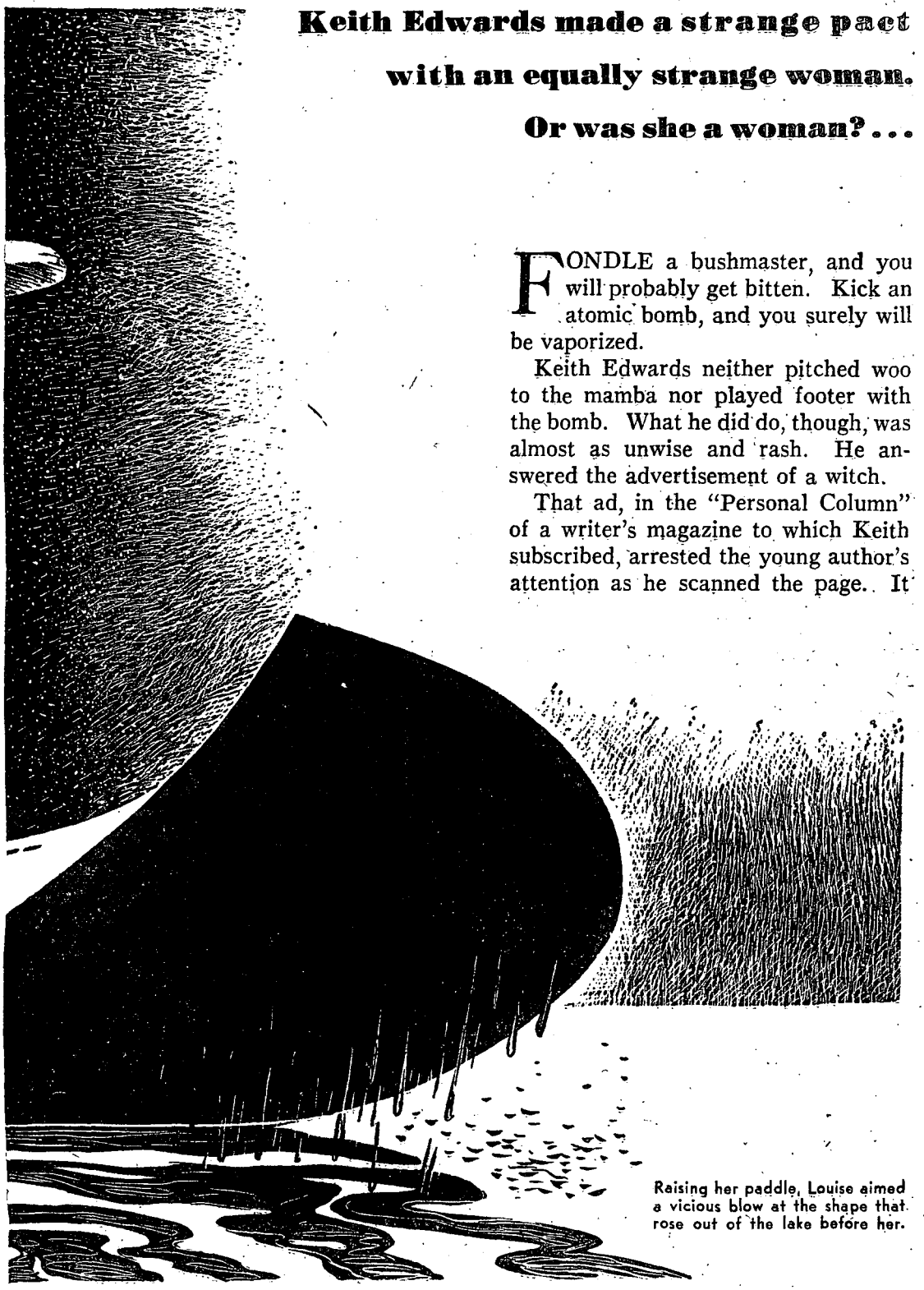
Keith Edwards made a strange pact with an equally strange woman. Or was she a woman? . . .

FONDLE a bushmaster, and you will probably get bitten. Kick an atomic bomb, and you surely will be vaporized.

Keith Edwards neither pitched woo to the mamba nor played footer with the bomb. What he did do, though, was almost as unwise and rash. He answered the advertisement of a witch.

That ad, in the "Personal Column" of a writer's magazine to which Keith subscribed, arrested the young author's attention as he scanned the page. It



Raising her paddle, Louise aimed a vicious blow at the shape that rose out of the lake before her.

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intrigued. He read it a second time.

Wealthy, beautiful girl schooled in black magic and necromancy desires to contact young man (writer preferred) interested in extending knowledge of the occult. Promise thrills, fun and unforgettable experiences. Dare you write me? All replies confidential. Box 666, *Writer's Treasure Chest.*

Keith grinned as he read. "Schooled in black magic and necromancy my foot!" he scoffed. "Hell, she's probably never been within hailing distance of a witch doctor. More likely, she's just a bored, spoiled society dame looking for a new sensation. I know the type."

Keith tossed the magazine aside, sprang up, and began pacing the floor. He wasn't grinning now, an angry scowl was ploughing deep ruts across his high forehead. The curly auburn hair, usually well combed, was now rumpled and disordered. Blue circles around bloodshot gray eyes indicated several sleepless nights. No seventh son of a seventh son was needed to point out that the big, ordinarily husky-looking young fellow was undergoing a tremendous emotional upheavel and appeared on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

Nine times out of ten, when a young man gets into such a state, some woman is to blame. This was one of the nine times. And the girl responsible for Keith's misery was his ex-fiancee, Sheila Brown.

All at once, making a sharp right wheel, Keith stopped to glare at the photograph on a mantel above the wide stone fireplace. To his fevered imagination, the eyes of the lovely platinum blonde held contemptuous amusement while a touch of mockery curved the full, passionate lips. With a savage imprecation, he snatched the picture from its place of honor and ruthlessly tore it piecemeal. He hurled the dismembered fragments upon the bed of glowing embers in the fireplace. Yellow tongues of flame licked them greedily.

One of Sheila's eyes, which had fallen short of its mark, stared up accusingly from the stone hearth. Keith pounced upon it and fed it to the blaze.

"There," he said in gloomy satisfaction, "that settles you, my lovely ex-fiancee. In that last cold, heartless little note you told me I could keep that picture to remember you by. You expect me to waste my affection on your pictured likeness while you bask at Palm Beach in the arms of your elderly Lothario, eh? Well, if that's your idea, you little two-timer, better guess again. For I have other plans!"

SUDDENLY, Keith's thoughts returned to the advertisement. Again he studied it, this time more carefully. When he finished, his heart was kindling with excitement. Perhaps his snap analysis of the advertiser had been faulty. Possibly, after all, she was what she claimed to be—a modern witch. If so—

"Why, in that case," thought Keith, "she's just the gal I'm looking for. Before I met Sheila I was deeply interested in black magic and the supernatural and only quit such research because of her attitude. She thought such things unholy and demon-inspired and refused to marry me unless I gave them up. She even mentioned them in that letter breaking our engagement, warning me not to return to such evil studies. Hell's bells! As if I'd take her advice now!"

Out of very perversity, because of a desire to disregard Sheila's wishes, Keith resolved to write the "witch." He sat down at his portable.

He banged out the final period, ripped the paper from the machine, and read what he had typed. Yes, it was exactly what he wanted.

"I'll take this down the lake to mail

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at once," he decided, as he put the letter into a stamped, addressed envelope. "The sooner it's off, the better."

Opening a door, Keith crossed a screened sleeping porch, pushed back a screen-door at its other end, and hurried down to the beach.

A rising wind moaned through tall pines behind the cottage. Above, an overcast sky reflected Keith's own black mood. Waves lashed savagely against the graveled shore, and whitecaps warned of a rough passage.

But Keith Edwards scorned the menace of the elements. He made his way to a narrow, wooden wharf where a trim little speedboat lay moored. Stepping in, he paddled out a short distance from the pier, then tried to start his outboard. At this third impatient yank on the pull-cord, it spun into vibrating action. With throttle open, he sped down the lake.

So rough was the water now that sometimes the propeller rose clear above the surface as waves jolted and rocked the motor-boat. Spray showered Keith as he crouched behind the motor with hand upon the steering rod. He ran in nearer shore, where the bucking of the waves was less pronounced, then continued on his course.

FLASHING past Birch Island, a white-beached, wooded islet half a mile from his camp, he noted as he drove by that the windows of the lone brown bungalow there still remained shuttered. Tom Davis, owner of the property, had told Keith that he had rented it for the summer to a New York woman. Spring had come late this year in Eastern Quebec, however, so some of the cottages might not be occupied before the First of June. Now, it was the middle of May.

Rounding Garrapy Point, Keith raced through the mile-long Narrows, where the lake thinned to half its average width. Here were no camps, only unbroken lines of forest. At the left, some distance inland, grim old Bear Mountain reared his rock-crowned head above the trees, while from the right grey Baldcap frowned down upon the passer-by. Glad to escape from the oppressive solitude of that lonely place, Keith moved on into the lower reaches of the lake. Ten minutes later he entered a partly landlocked bay with a row of tourist cabins buttoned along its farther shore. This was Simmonds' Landing.

Ahead, a dozen boats lay drawn up on the sloping beach. Shutting off his motor, Keith taxied in and beached his own boat, pulled it well up on the sand. He passed the camps, crossed a road, and climbed a short, steep hill upon which stood a large, comfortable-looking brick house. Keith mounted stone steps leading to a wide veranda. At its upper end, a woman lay, apparently asleep, in a couch hammock.

Keith walked quietly over, and stood gazing down at the sleeper. Decidedly easy on a man's eyes was Louise Simmonds, the vivacious young widow who ran the tourist camps. Masses of medium-brown hair framed a very pretty face . . . flirtatious black eyes, hidden now by long, dark lashes . . . velvet-smooth cheeks . . . nicely shaped nose . . . finely chiseled chin—and tempting red lips. A delightfully feminine figure, not too plump and not too thin, with curves where curves ought to be. Age twenty-seven, two years older than Keith. The death of her much older husband the summer before had left Louise free, with a comfortable income. Many men had found her irresistible, but she had never succeeded in greatly impressing Keith. That fact had piqued her interest in the young writer.

Louise opened her eyes and looked

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up.

"Did I wake you?" asked Keith coolly. "Sorry."

Louise smiled.

"Hello, Hermit . . . Oh, I wasn't really asleep, just in a brown study, and you came up so silently I didn't hear you. Say, you must be crazy, coming down on an afternoon like this! Don't you know there's a storm brewing? It'll catch you before you get back."

Keith registered indifference. "If it does I'll weather it. Any mail?"

She shook her head. "Not even a post card. Guess your girl friend's forgetting you, Hermit. She used to be regular."

Keith flushed. Rage tore again at his heart strings.

"That's finished," he said. "But definitely. And listen, stop calling me Hermit. I'm no monk!"

She raised quizzical eyebrows.

"No? Well, I'm not so sure. Living all by yourself in that swell big camp up there! Most men would want company."

HER words and tone were provocative. Many young men would have eagerly accepted the thinly veiled invitation, but Keith refused to rise to the bait.

"Well," he drawled, "perhaps I'll have some myself before the summer's over. Rather special company."

Louise looked at him with new, jealous interest. For the first time she noticed the change in him. The blue circles around his eyes, the lines of worry in his forehead—and his reckless expression.

"Something's hit him," she told herself—"and hit mighty hard. Easy to see that."

Aloud she laughed, "I'll believe that when I see it, Hermit. But, all kidding aside, that storm's liable to be a terror. Better stay down tonight. I can give you a cabin—if you're afraid to stay with me at the house."

But he shook his head. "Thanks a lot, but I don't mind a wetting. Besides, I have some work to do this evening. Before I go, though, there's something else. Will you mail this for me, Louise? It's rather important."

The widow nodded. "Oh sure, Hermit. I'll give it to the mailman in the morning. Anything else?"

"No," replied Keith, "that's all."

Turning away, he went back to his motor-boat. Louise Simmonds watched him put out into the bay and pull the starting cord. The engine leapt into life, and the boat dashed up the lake.

"Whew!" whistled the watcher, as the craft disappeared around a bend, "he's running her wide open. Speed's that boy's first name today!"

Louise glanced curiously at the letter entrusted to her. The address told her little.

"I wonder what this is?" she thought. "It must have been something pretty urgent to have brought him down in such weather. Oh well, it's really none of my business. If I were like some women I'd steam the letter open and satisfy my curiosity before sending it along. But I promised to mail it safely, and I will."

CHAPTER II

ON A sunny afternoon a few days later, a young woman lay on the beach at Los Angeles beneath a yellow umbrella. Stretched face downwards on a large terry cloth beach blanket, she was reading a black leather covered book. Glancing over her shoulder, one might have been startled to find that it was not one of the currently popular over-length novels but a graphic and

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extensive survey of Black Magic. Some of its contents were revoltingly gruesome, so much so that they would have shocked or sickened many, but those passages seemed merely to bore the present reader. To her the book appeared commonplace.

"What dull stuff," she thought. "Like most writers about such matters, the man knows little. He has barely scratched the surface. Someday, I think I'll write a book myself—an autobiography of my own occult experiences. But, if I did, who would dare print it?"

The girl yawned, put the book aside, then drew from her handbag a sheaf of unopened letters held together with a rubber band. She slit open the first with a pearl handled paper knife and unfolded the enclosure.

She read only a few lines, then tossed the letter aside contemptuously. Opening other letters, she treated them similarly. Finally only one letter remained —the one from Keith Edwards.

The girl read a few words carelessly, then her attention focused. Violet eyes riveted upon the typed sheet. The eyes lit with excitement.

"This is it," thought the girl exultantly. "Here is the man I've been looking for."

She finished reading Keith's letter, then lay back with eyes closed, the envelope held lightly between long, beautifully manicured fingers. She stretched lazily like a great cat, then relaxed in thought. He lovely body, tanned a golden brown and nude save for a very abbreviated white silk bathing suit, was still, but in her wild, restless mind was an erupting volcano. For this woman lived for one thing only—exciting adventure. Daughter of a British general and a Russian ballet dancer, Irma Dane's career had been, to put it mildly, unusual. When only six, she had been kidnaped by an East Indian yogi who had harbored a grudge against her soldier father, and during the four years which had elapsed before her rescue, the precocious child had assimilated an almost amazing fund of knowledge concerning mesmerism, clairvoyance and magic.

TWO years later, General Dane had succumbed to snake bite, and the following June his widow had married an Irish soldier of fortune, Captain Desmond, then, together with the child, had accompanied him to South America, where he had taken part in two revolutions. In the second the rebel forces had been victorious, and the new president had shown proper appreciation of the Irishman's military services by creating him Minister of War. He had also enriched him with valuable mining shares, so at the time of Desmond's death by an assassin's bullet five years afterwards he was very wealthly. Leaving South America, mother and daughter had gone to live in Hollywood. The former ballet dancer had played minor roles in film productions, then had died of flu, and Irma had become mistress of a large fortune.

From then on the girl's life had been hectic. She had traveled the wide world over, enlarging her already vast store of psychic knowledge by contact with astrologers, witch doctors and magicians.

Nor had Irma confined her studies to the occult. She had a good understanding of art, music and literature. And —on the side—she had had numerous love affairs.

The first of the latter, at the early age of thirteen, had been with a Chilean gentleman, a guest of her stepfather. After that, there had been others. Not that Irma had ever made herself cheap or common, for she was fastidious. But

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like Kipling's soldier, she had had her "picking of sweethearts and some of them had been prime." Now at the present moment, however, she felt bored and dissatisfied. Her present male companions seemed too sophisticated, too civilized. Irma was tired of them all. She wanted someone fresh and clean. A young man of imagination, who would be a willing pupil, and who might also prove an exciting lover.

And now, thanks to her advertisement in *The Treasure Chest,* she had found her man.

Irma laughed delightedly. "This letter is witty, imaginative and amusing," she told herself. . . . "I think this summer may not prove so dull, after all."

So the witch went home and wrote a letter. Still smiling, she affixed an air mail stamp and sent it winging East.

THREE nights later, Keith Edwards, who had beaten the predicted storm on his homeward trip by the narrowest of margins, came down again for his mail. Louise handed him Irma Dane's reply. Her glance followed it curiously.

"Well, Hermit," she mocked, "you *are* coming along. A Los Angeles letter with a Hollywood return address. And in a woman's handwriting, too. Trying to date a star?"

"You'd be surprised," smiled Keith, slipping the envelope into his pocket. "Didn't I tell you I might have company before long?"

Louise laughed shortly. "Yes? Well, who is she? Don't keep me in suspense!"

Outwardly indifferent, inwardly she was thinking, "I must be slipping. Something's screwy somewhere when a man goes looking for romance way across the continent when I'm right here ready and willing. What's a star got that I haven't?"

While Keith thought, "Not a bad looker, this Simmonds dame. Lots of men would fall hard for her. But not me. She's not so bad, maybe, but I'm fastidious. I want to find a woman who can make me forget Sheila. To do that, she must be extra-special, though."

"He doesn't even see me," the merry widow told herself bitterly. "I'll bet my ankles are as nicely curved as this Hollywood girl's, and that my complexion is just as good, too. Oh, why is the Hermit so blind? To tell the truth, I'm getting to be nuts about that guy. He's got what it takes. Oh, but what's the use? He's looking right through me as if I didn't exist."

Keith was. He could not see the glamorous, seductive young widow who so craved his attention. He was looking beyond her, visualizing the more sophisticated girl thousands of miles away.

While out in sunny California Irma was thinking, "He should have my letter by now. Will he reply soon, or will my frankness frighten him away? Perhaps I was foolish to have written so at first and should have worked up to things more gradually. But I wrote as I felt, and, if he's the man I take him for, he won't mind my unconventionality . . . Anyhow, we shall see."

BACK on the lake, Keith stopped his motor and let the boat drift while he read the letter.

Dear Writer from Quebec:

Your response to my ad charms me. It stimulates my interest. . . . A summer in your lovely Eastern Quebec lake country sounds divine.

You are rather particular, aren't you? However, I'm glad, as I'm pretty exacting, too, when it comes to male companions. . . . I think I fill all your requirements, Keith.

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Certainly I'm sophisticated, human and oh, how adventurous! Beautiful? Well, judge for yourself by the enclosed rather revealing snapshot. . . .

No, of course I'm not kidding about being a sorceress. Not that I ride through the air on a broomstick; I usually travel by plane. But I've hobnobbed with Indian medicine men, witch doctors of Haiti and Africa, Tibetan monks —and even devil worshippers of Khurdistan. I've witnessed unholy rites that would make your blood congeal and have—but why go on? In short, if you're in earnest about wanting to continue your studies of the occult, why, I'm the gal that can teach you. I'm young yet—in years only 23—but I've had worlds of experience.

Well, that's Irma Dane. Now, about yourself? More details, please, not too scrappy. And more about your wilderness surroundings, too. Exactly what can you offer a bored, restless, adventure-hunting modern sorceress in exchange for her tutoring and companionship this summer?

Reply by air.

Expectantly,

Irma Dane

Keith gazed long and hard at the snapshot. It left little to the imagination, but that little tantalized. The picture set the young writer's heart racing madly. Studying the black art under such an instructress would be more than thrilling.

Could Louise Simmonds have seen the look in Keith's eyes she would have gnashed her teeth! Nor would an impartial judge have wondered at Keith's reaction. For the sophisticate of Hollywood was indeed something extra-special. Dark hair and violet eyes . . . beautiful hands (Keith always judged a woman by her hands) which showed the mark of centuries of high breeding . . . symmetrically curved hips and exquisitively turned ankles. . . . That was Irma Dane.

"She's unbelievable," thought Keith excitedly. "Sheila was pretty, but this girl is the kind one dreams of but never sees. I'll write back immediately."

He feasted his gaze on the witch's picture for some minutes longer, then replaced it in the envelope, which he returned to his pocket. Then he started his motor again.

At his camp he wrote a long letter, describing the country in considerable detail. Then, in a burst of honesty, he poured out his heart to his new correspondent. He told her of Sheila, of his former studies regarding the supernatural and his willingness to resume them—and of his need for an understanding girl companion to cure him of his hurt. "Such an understanding woman as yourself," he wrote, "who will be my guide and teacher. In return, I'll place myself wholly at your disposal for the summer. Come be my companion, Irma Dane, and I'll be an ardent, willing pupil. I know this district well, every nook and corner, and I'll take you off the beaten tourist tracks into a savagely beautiful wilderness. And then, in Autumn when nights grow colder and frosts are crimsoning the leaves, we'll say goodby and never afterwards (unless at your own request) shall I try to re-enter your life. That's a fair offer, I think. Come, is it a bargain?"

CHAPTER III

A BARGAIN it soon became. From Hollywood Irma wrote: Thank you for your frankness. I admire hon-

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esty. As for your own picture, why, you're marvelous, darling . . . I thrill with anticipation . . . And I adore beautiful scenery The places you mention and describe sound almost breath-takingly lovely. I can hardly wait to see them—and you. I can't come just yet, though, not until the middle of July. Will that do?

Irma

P. S. I warn you that I shall hold you to your promises and shall expect your undivided attention. You will need strong nerves, too, in order to perform some of the tasks I have mapped out for you. Does the prospect frighten you? Hope not, darling.

I. D.

With their mutual agreement, the pact was made between the witch and Keith Edwards, then letters began to fly back and forth. All religious inhibitions and prickings of conscience disregarded, Keith abandoned himself to the pursuit of forbidden knowledge under the tutorship of his enchantress. For his purpose he could scarcely have chosen a better teacher. Irma was indeed a sophisticated cosmopolite. Her teachings were almost entirely pagan, frankly unconventional, and thoroughly fascinating.

Irma's frankness at first somewhat shocked the young neophyte, for he had been brought up in a Puritan household. Soon, however, as he grew more accustomed to Irma's point of view, he adapted himself to her way of thinking and found the lessons fascinating and enjoyable.

Those lessons embraced numerous subjects. Telepathy, necromancy, devil worship, astralization—of all these and more Irma possessed astounding knowledge.

"Two years ago," recorded the sorceress, "I made a yachting trip to the voodoo land of Haiti. My companion was a student of the occult and also was a friend of a powerful witch doctor there. The latter took a fancy to me, declared that I had unusual psychic powers, and taught me unholy and horrible secrets which I dare not reveal here. . . . The study of black art is surely fascinating, though, and could be dangerous in the hands of an unscrupulous woman like myself. So let me warn you, darling, that I have an extremely jealous nature, and if during our stay together I ever catch you roaming other womanwards, something very terrible will be liable to happen to the girl and to yourself. . . . How would you like, my Keith, to be seized with cramps or paralyzed from the neck down? To be—but why continue? I'm sure you'll be too wise to provoke my wrath, darling. You'd better be!"

BY NOW Keith was beginning to realize that he had let himself in for much more than he had intended. In his saner moments he cursed himself for his reckless bargain and was almost ready to call the whole thing off. But it seemed as if his thought must have carried to Irma, for in her next letter she accused him of half heartedness and threatened dire consequences if he tried to break their agreement. "I haven't changed all my summer plans," she declared, and spent hours writing letters of instruction, to have you run out on me now. You will go through with everything as agreed—or else. And I mean OR ELSE!"

That threat angered Keith and aroused his combative spirit. "No woman can order me around," he told himself indignantly, "and in the morning I'll send a letter telling her so!" That evening he composed a heated declaration of independence, then went to bed satisfied. But in the morning he awoke

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shaking with chills from head to foot while excruciating pains racked his neck and shoulders. For two days he was too weak to leave the camp. On the morning of the third day, obsessed with the belief that Irma was somehow responsible for his condition, he burned the letter. When, soon afterwards, his pains suddenly ceased and strength returned, he felt properly awed and resolved never again to incur the displeasure of the enchantress.

Once her subject had returned to his allegiance, Irma relaxed from her menacing attitude. Alluringly she pictured the delights of illicit lore—of enthrallingly exciting pleasures in store for her pupil. She scented her letters now with a strange, subtly exotic perfume which she called "Perfume of Desire"—a rare, costly product of the Orient. Louise Simmonds sniffed at one such perfumed envelope, and her black eyes smoldered.

"This Hollywood siren's got the Hermit going in circles," she thought with conviction, "and she's not doing him any good, either. I'm no angel, but I'd be better for the boy than that California attraction. I don't know her, of course, but just one whiff of that perfume's enough. The Old Nick himself must have made it!"

When she gave Keith the letter, Louise challenged, "I thought you told me you'd be having company, Hermit? She doesn't seem to get here very fast. Were you just bragging, or are you really expecting someone?"

Keith's smile was tantalizing. "Wait and see," he answered. Then, on a sudden impulse, he pulled out his billfold. He flicked it open and pointed to a snapshot.

"There!" he exclaimed. "What do you think of her?"

LOUISE gasped. Her gaze fastened upon the picture. She had never seen anything quite like it. In the center of a patch of white sand with a background of foam-capped waves breaking upon a reef, Irma lay on a blanket beneath an umbrella. At one side was a pair of sun glasses, and behind her, beach sandals. A flimsy, provocative bathing suit failed to conceal the exquisite contours of her lovely figure.

"My God!"

Almost never did Louise indulge in profanity. The fact that she did now revealed the depth of her emotion.

"So that's her, Hermit!"

"That's the lady." Keith snapped the billfold shut and replaced it in his pocket. "Well?"

Louise faced him. "You fool!" she blazed. "You're getting beyond your depth. That dame's not your style, Hermit. I'm no prophetess, but I can tell you this, big boy. Play around with that piece of dynamite and you'll get burnt. And I don't mean just scorched!"

"Oh yeah?" said Keith, pleased with the effect created by the picture. "Well, we shall see. Meanwhile, as I've told you so much, I may as well let you know the rest. My girl friend has promised to give me a long-distance ring tonight—and that's not all, either. She's coming the middle of July. What do you think of that?"

The merry widow stared, then, realizing he was in earnest, her eyes flashed. "You fool!" she screamed again. "Oh, you fool!"

And then, to Keith's amazement, she turned and rushed into the house, slamming the door.

Keith gazed after her, astounded and not a little disturbed. Never before had he seen Louise lose control of herself, and he wondered uneasily what would be the result when she and Irma met face to face? The thought held unpleasant possibilities.

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Later, however, when his call came, he forgot Louise. For Irma's voice, like her letters, enchanted him. Beautifully modulated, yet with an under note of throbbing passion beneath its cool sophistication, it stirred hidden depths in his mind and heart.

"Nice to hear your voice, darling," said Irma. . . . It's just as I've imagined it. . . . No, it won't be a long wait now. I'm taking that plane trip over the Grand Canyon next Thursday, then when I get back I'll head straight for you, Keith. Until then, *au revoir.*"

A LETTER received next day revealed Irma in one of her most whimsical and appealing moods. "I've always believed in fairies, darling," she wrote. "Some night, I shall wander out of our camp into the forest to look for them in the moonlight. And, if I find them, I may go away with them forever. But, if I don't, well, Keith, I shall come back disappointed—and you'll have to comfort me all the rest of the night!"

And then, two days later, came a strange letter. "Darling," said Irma, "I have told you I'm psychic. And all day I've had forebodings. It's no idle fancy, I think . . . something is going to happen. But, listen, Keith, if it does, don't let it worry you. I promise you that whatever occurs, I will keep our rendezvous. *Whatever happens,* darling. So, don't try putting anyone in my place, or I shall be very angry.

"I can see our camp. Because of your pictures of it, and your vivid descriptions, I can see it all clearly. I can take a bird's-eye view of the whole lake . . . of Birch Island with its small brown bungalow . . . the Narrows beyond, and Simmonds' Landing . . . I can see you, too, Keith, waiting for me. And you won't have to wait in vain.

"Well, tomorrow I leave on the plane trip. And then, when I return, I shall go to meet you.

Irma"

THAT letter troubled Keith Edwards. Worried him all the rest of that day and into the evening. He had never thought himself unduly superstitious, but now a premonition of impending disaster oppressed him. He fell asleep thinking about it.

And while he slept he had a frightful dream. A dream or a vision. For it seemed no mere dream; it was too horribly real.

He saw a great plane racing through the sky, and with X-ray eyes he looked through it into the passenger section. Seated there, talking with a stewardess, he saw Irma. He watched the girl pass on, saw Irma lean back and close her eyes. Then, when she opened them again, she looked straight ahead. He knew that across the miles she was looking at him. Her lips moved, as if trying to word a message. And then, clear as morning bell, he heard her voice:

"Don't forget what I told you, Keith. I'll be there!"

The scene within the plane faded out. Again Keith saw the air liner flash on through the sky. He say it approaching snow-clad peaks . . . heard the engines skipping . . . saw the ship nose down. He knew momentary relief as it partly righted, then groaned as it plunged towards the side of the nearest mountain. Then came a terrific impact and an awful explosion.

Keith sprang from his bed. He stood in darkness, eyes wide and staring, heart pumping madly. The shock of the explosion had awakened him. But, had it been only a dream?

The young author tried to believe that it had been nothing worse. "I went to sleep worrying about that plane

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flight Irma was taking," he remembered. "The thought brought on the nightmare. That was all."

But he could not convince himself that it was all. The dream had been too real for that. That message from Irma had been too clear.

Keith laughed shakily. "I must be getting jittery," he told himself, "to let a dream affect me so. I'll just forget the whole silly business."

He got back into bed and tried to shut out the remembrance, but could not. Finally, in an effort to distract his attention from the nightmare, he switched on his portable radio. A few bars of music—then a dramatic announcement:

"We interrupt this program for a news flash . . . A large air liner from Los Angeles has crashed in the mountains. Residents in the valley below heard the explosion. It will take rescue parties several hours to reach the scene of the wreck, and it is feared that few, if any, of the twenty persons aboard can have survived. Among the passengers was Miss Irma Dane, the lovely Los Angeles long-distance swimmer and world traveller, whose series of articles in a nationally known magazine last year on 'The World Beyond' created such a furore . . . Others believed to have been involved in the tragedy were . . ."

CHAPTER IV

THEY buried the charred, unrecognizable body of Irma Dane in a common grave with other plane crash victims.

Keith heard all the lurid details on his radio. He listened like a man dazed. Even now he could scarcely realize the shocking truth. Re-reading Irma's letters, it seemed to him inconceivable that a being so electrically charged with life and passion could so soon have become a lifeless, blackened thing.

Nor did the fact of his regained freedom bring relief. Irma's passing filled him with an unutterable sense of loss. For weeks her fascinating personality had influenced Keith's actions; her letters had reached out to draw him closer to her, and her voice, clear and vibrant over the telephone, had sent flames of passion leaping through his veins. He had so looked forward to her coming!

Now, he thought dully, all that was forever ended. Irma Dane was dead. Now they would never meet.

As for her message, already it seemed meaningless. Irma had promised to keep her rendezvous, but Death cancelled all such pledges. You don't keep rendezvous with the buried dead.

Keith did not go down the lake again for several days. When he did go, he noticed, as he passed Birch Island, that the brown bungalow (which had remained unoccupied since last autumn) was no longer vacant. A beautiful red-headed girl stood above the landing, and beside her was an older woman in a nurse's uniform.

Even in his anguish of soul Keith realized how very attractive the girl was, and he wondered at the presence of the nurse. Certainly, the red-head did not look ill; she appeared the picture of glowing health. But perhaps someone was sick inside the cottage?

Keith sped on down the lake to Simmonds' Landing. He found Louise awaiting him.

SHE, too, had heard the news. Inwardly jubilant, the merry widow cleverly concealed her satisfaction. She had hated Irma Dane in life, and now she felt relief because of her death. But she greeted Keith with expressions of sympathy.

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"You poor boy!" she exclaimed. "I'm sorry I spoke as I did about your friend, Hermit. I heard it all on the radio. You must feel terribly, Keith."

"I do," replied Keith bitterly. "I feel as if something vital has gone out of my life. I can't put it into words, Louise. It's too deep."

Louise nodded. "Sure," she agreed, "I know. Yes, it was horrible, all right. But, don't let it get you down, Hermit. You're young and successful, with most of life ahead. Brace up, now. Show you can take it."

He did not answer, but stared gloomily at the ground. She stepped forward, laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. "Listen, Hermit," she whispered, "you're lonely. You shouldn't stay at that big camp all by yourself. You need companionship. You need a woman."

Keith looked at her then. For the first time he really felt her appeal. She was right, too. He did need feminine companionship. Louise wasn't Irma, of course, but still she was a woman —and very lovely.

"Perhaps you're right," he said. "Yes, I do need someone . . . It's nice of you to understand."

Deliberately, she put her arms around his neck. Soft, hot lips clung to his. "I've always wanted to do this, Hermit," she whispered . . . "Listen, tonight, when everyone's asleep, I'm going up to visit you. I'll come in my canoe."

She waited, expectant, for his answer. It was slow in coming. Even while he held Louise in his arms, he was remembering that last message of the dead witch. "Don't forget what I told you, darling. I'll be there."

Impatiently, Keith shook off the thought. "Words, just meaningless words," he assured himself. "Can the dead keep rendezvous? Can the dead return?"

"Well," the widow's lips were close to his ear, "how about it, Hermit? Is it a date?"

He kissed her then.

"I'll be expecting you," he said.

HALFWAY back up the lake, Keith stopped to talk with Tom Davis, who was out fishing. "I see there's someone in the island bungalow at last, Tom," he said. "I caught a glimpse of them as I came by."

Davis nodded. "Yes, the woman from New York couldn't come herself, so she sub-let to friends from the Pacific Coast who are visiting these parts this summer. There are three of them: Mrs. Hudson, her daughter Lorraine, and the girl's nurse, Edith Blackburn."

The girl's nurse?" repeated Keith, surprised. "You mean the mother's, don't you, Tom? That pretty red-head that I saw didn't look sick."

Davis hesitated. "Well, perhaps I ought not to tell you, Keith," he replied at length, "for the nurse warned me to keep it under my hat. But, this Lorraine's a sure enough beauty, and you might think of getting friendly with her, so I guess I'd better give you the lowdown on her, son. The girl's not normal."

Keith looked startled. "You mean she's feeble-minded?" he asked incredulously. "She doesn't look it."

Davis shook his head. "Oh no, she's as bright as a new-minted coin. According to the nurse, though, she's sort of afflicted. Takes and has fits."

"Fits?"

"Uh-huh. Not epileptic, the kind where they froth at the mouth and go into convulsions, but the other sort. Cataleptic, I guess the word it. Yes, that's it, cataleptic. The nurse says this Hudson girl stiffens out like she was dead and lies in a sort of trance

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for hours on end. Then she comes back to herself and remembers nothing about it."

"Oh, I see," said Keith. "Well, thanks for the tip, Tom. I certainly wouldn't want to take out anyone like that. She's liable to pass out on me and make things embarrassing."

KEITH cast a curious glance at the island as he went past. No one was visible. The nurse was bending over her. The lovely red-head was completely motionless, showing no sign of life. Edith Blackburn shook her head sadly.

"It's uncanny," thought the attendant. "I can't understand it. The girl's body is here before me, but that's all. It's as if her soul has departed."

The nurse shook her head again. then turned softly away. She went on to the next bedroom, where Mrs. Hudson sat crying bitterly.

Unaware of what was happening in the cottage, Keith Edwards continued on to his lonely camp. He prepared for the coming of his self-invited guest.

That night, he went out on the porch and looked at moon and stars. He listened to the lap of little waves upon the beach. It was a lovely night, softly warm and fragrant with the scent of the pines. A wonderful night. A night such as he and Irma had often dreamed of.

Irma! Ah, there was that name to again mock him. Irma Dane was dead. He must forget her. This was the Fifteenth of July. Tonight the sorceress was to have been there, but tonight she lay in her grave three thousand miles away. And tonight he was meeting Louise.

Keith sighed and looked at his watch. It was eleven o'clock.

"She'll be coming now," he thought. "Soon, she will be here."

Down the lake, a light canoe containing one person glided swiftly across the water. The merry widow, kneeling in its bottom, dipped her paddle deep and sent the frail craft forward at a still faster clip. Very beautiful was Louise, as she knelt there in the soft moonlight. She had on only a green swim suit, and her bare arms and shoulders gleamed whitely in the starlight. Her face was radiant.

She spoke her thoughts aloud, addressing her dead rival:

"The Hermit is mine now. It is I who will possess him, not you, Irma Dane. You will never have him now, for you are dead!"

The widow's loud, exultant laugh rang out across the water. And she drove jubilantly on into the Narrows.

CHAPTER V

IN THE brown bungalow on Birch Island the nurse lay asleep on a couch. Across the room, on a bed, Lorraine Hudson was still in that cataleptic trance.

All at once there came a change. Lorraine stirred, moved restlessly. Her eyes opened. She smiled.

Because the night was warm, she was covered by only one thin sheet and blanket. Throwing these back, she slipped her feet to the floor, and stood up. In an instant she had stripped away her sleeping pajamas, which fell in a crumpled heap at her feet. With another swift, catlike movement she caught up a white satin bathing suit from off a chair and pulled it on. Raising her arms above her head, she stretched in another cat-like gesture. Then she laughed, softly and almost soundlessly.

The oil lamp, turned low, threw a dim shadow across the face of the sleeping nurse. Stepping lightly to the

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couch, Lorraine bent over Edith Blackburn and whispered strange words, as if to bind the woman under a spell, out of its door, and down to the boat landing. She stood a moment lovely in the night light, then dove cleanly into the lake.

She came up several yards away, and swam down into the Narrows. Straight into the path of the oncoming canoe!

Louise, paddling along, heard a splash in the water. Glancing aside, she saw the approaching swimmer.

"Watch out!" she screamed. "You'll upset me!"

The swimmer laughed—a fierce, triumphant laugh.

"Go back, girl! Keith Edwards is mine. You cannot have him!"

Louise stopped paddling, stared.

"Who are you? But, it doesn't matter, whoever you are. The Hermit wants me. I am going to him."

Again the swimmer laughed. She was very near now.

"I am she whom you called dead. I am Irma Dane."

"You can't be!" shrieked Louise. "Irma Dane is dead. She died in a plane crash!"

But the swimmer's voice rang out like a victory bell: "My body died, but not my soul. And tonight I keep rendezvous with Keith. Back, foolish girl, before I get really angry."

But the widow did not turn back. A mad frenzy gripped her.

Raising her paddle, she aimed a vicious blow at the swimmer's head.

Driven with the force of hate, had that blow landed it would have split the swimmer's skull. But it did not land. The intended victim ducked, and the paddle blade cut the water harmlessly.

A CRY of anger broke from the girl in the water. Hurling herself upward and forward in a pantherish spring, she capsized the canoe.

A good swimmer herself, Louise Simmonds might even then have reached shore safely, but did not try. Temporarily insane with baffled desire and murderous fury, she threw herself savagely upon her rival, striving to drag her under.

The girl who called herself Irma Dane fought back like an enraged tigress. Clawing at each other like jungle cats, the two pulled hair, slapped, and kicked. Then, at close quarters, they locked in a deadly embrace, wild with the lust to kill.

Still fighting furiously, the rivals disappeared beneath the surface . . . Moments passed, then a head bobbed above the water—but only one.

For a few moments the victor floated upon the surface, recovering breath, then, turning from that fatal spot, swam swiftly, quietly up the lake.

On the wharf waited Keith Edwards. He heard a faint splash, then saw the head and shoulders of a woman as she swam alongside.

"Is that you, Louise?" he said.

The girl drew herself from the water, upon the pier, and came to him. "No, faithless one," she said, "it is not Louise. This was not her rendezvous but ours."

Keith started. He felt, strangely enough, no fear. Only a great wonder.

"Ours? you mean—?"

"I mean that I have come to keep my promise. Death itself could not stop me."

And in amazed joy Keith knew that it was true.

Still marveling, he put out a finger and touched her cheek. He thrilled to the contact. No dead woman this, but a fully alive one, passionate and expectant.

(Continued on page 168)

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(Continued from page 166)

He put his arm around her. She wound soft, strong arms about his neck and drew him close.

"Keith," she whispered. "Keith!"

Her lips were on his now, bruising them into submission.

"Irma! Is it really you, Irma?"

She gave a low laugh. "Of course, darling. They buried my body, but not the real Irma Dane. You can't kill the soul, Keith. Tonight I am here, in another body. The body of the girl on Birch Island—the one who has the cataleptic fits. I had known her in California, was aware of her affliction, and had learned she was coming to stay at the bungalow. Tonight, while her spirit was away, astralized, mine slipped into its place. . . . So—I am here."

Her tone grew impatient: "But, enough talk. Have I flown more than halfway across the continent for talk alone? I have much to teach you, my pupil—things exciting, thrilling. Come Keith."

She slipped a hand in his. Together, they went into the cottage. . . .

IN THE morning Keith awoke. He pressed a hand to his forehead. "I've been dreaming again," he thought. "But what? I remember going down to the wharf to meet Louise, but that is all. The rest is hazy."

Later that afternoon, as he started down the lake, he overtook Tom Davis, in another motor-boat.

Davis hailed him: "Hello, Keith. Terrible business about Louise Simmonds, isn't it?"

Keith stared at him. "Louise Simmonds? What do you mean, Tom?"

"What? You haven't heard, then? They found her overturned canoe drifting in the Narrows. They're getting ready to drag now."

Keith felt sick at heart. "So, that's why she didn't come last night," he thought. "Poor Louise."

With others, he assisted in the grim search. Grapples failed to locate the body that day, however, for it lay tangled deep in the weeds.

That night, as it neared the stroke of midnight, Keith rose from uneasy sleep and found himself walking down to the wharf. A girl swimmer, appearing in the moonlight, drew herself up the side of his boat, and stepped out of it into his arms. She kissed him with a hundred strange kisses, whispered unspeakable words in his ears—and Time stood still . . . And, the following morning, as on the preceding one, he tried to recall what he thought was a dream. But tried in vain, for by the will of the witch, his teacher, he remembered nothing.

Days later, they found and fished Louise Simmonds' body from its watery resting-place at the bottom of the Narrows. Keith glanced once at the swollen, unlovely features of the once beautiful, vivacious merry widow, then turned shudderingly away. He had never loved Louise, yet she had cared for him . . .

But that night, as on several nights preceding it, he completely forgot her in the company of the strange girl who called herself Irma Dane but who outwardly was Lorraine Hudson.

Night followed night until at length a crisp autumn frost crimsoned the leaves and sent them rustling to carpet the ground. Then it was, early in October, that Irma said: "You've been wonderful, Keith—the very nicest pupil I've ever had. But now our summer is over. Yet I almost hate to leave you; I've grown so fond of you. Still, a promise is a promise, and I shall keep our bargain."

(Continued on page 170)

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What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?

EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy. Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which "whispers" to you from within.

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(Continued from page 168)

THEY were standing on the wharf below the camp when she said that. Keith's voice was a wail of protest:

"You are going away? You are giving Lorraine back her body?"

Irma shrugged. "No, why should I? I told you once, darling, that I'm a most unscrupulous woman. I have the girl's body now, and I like it. Possession is nine tenths of the law, isn't it? Besides, you needn't worry about Lorraine. She was in love with a curly haired young air lieutenant who died over Tokio, and she always mourned for him. Now, the two are back together again, happy as larks."

"I wasn't thinking of Lorraine Hudson," said Keith, "but about ourselves. Can you leave me now?"

A look of tenderness came in her eyes. "Well, I meant to kiss and say good-bye, darling, but neither of us seems to want that. Yet, although I like you so much now, I might tire of you if I remained with you always. Or, you might tire of me. I can't risk that. If you wish, though, I'll make another agreement. For eleven months each year I'll leave you free. Go with whom you like, love whom you like; yes, even marry if you want to. But never, no never, bring any woman, wife or light-of-love, to this camp. This place must remain sacred to us alone. If you disregard my wish, you will lose me.

"But," and the seductive voice softened to a caress as the girl leaned closer, "if you do what I ask, then every year from the middle of July until the Fifteenth of August I'll keep rendezvous with you here. And each year I will teach you new, wonderful secrets which I have learned during my wanderings through Time, and I will love you as no man ever was loved before. . . . Now, I must really go. . . ."

She bent and kissed him long and lingeringly upon the lips, then, with a gay wave of her hand, she slipped down the side of the wharf into the water, while he stood silently by, disturbed and watching.

For a long time Keith remained there, gazing after her, then he turned and went back into the camp.

IN THE morning he awoke, and unlike on other mornings after the girl's visits, it was with memory clear as a bell. Every incident connected with those marvelous nights was etched upon his mind, every lesson deeply engraved there.

Upon a table in his room he found a beautifully tooled new billfold. He opened it. In its photograph section was a tinted snapshot of Irma Dane, but the lock of hair enclosed with the witch's gift was red.

Keith hurried to his speed boat, and headed down the lake. Before he had gone far, he met Tom Davis.

"Well, Keith," remarked the older man, "it's been an exciting summer. But it's over with now. The last of my tenants, that party on the island, pulled out early this morning. But they're coming back again next year."

Davis tugged thoughtfully at his sandy moustache. "I guess," he added, "the holiday here did that girl Lorraine a heap of good. She hasn't had a fit since the middle of July, Edith Blackburn said. Fact is, she seems a different girl altogether."

"By the way, Tom," Keith tried to make the question casual, "was that Hudson girl a good swimmer?"

Davis' answer removed Keith's last shadow of doubt.

"Swimmer? Why, no, son, the nurse could swim a little, a few yards, maybe. But that Lorraine girl, she couldn't swim a stroke."

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ENVIOUS members of the writing craft sometimes whisper dark suspicions about Keith Edwards. They declare that, like Faust, he must have an inholy pact with Satan.

Such assertions might appear ridiculous and fantastic were it not for certain facts which the writers marshal to back their opinion. In brief, here is a summary of that circumstantial evidence. Suddenly, after several years of mediocre success, Keith soared to stratospheric heights of literary glory. Now, as an author of tales of the weird and supernatural, he reigns supreme. Moreover, while other fictionists rove the wide world over in search for new, startling data regarding matters pertaining to the occult, he, spending most of his time in North America, seems always to have access to an amazing store of knowledge denied to themselves. Unless instructed by the Fiend, how can he learn so much?

One fact juts out prominently. No matter how busy he may be, Keith takes a one month's holiday every summer. That holiday invariably begins the middle of July. He spends his vacation at his camp on a beautiful little lake somewhere in Eastern Quebec, and when he returns, his typewriter, humming with inspiration, pours forth those inimitable yarns which cause editors to draft acceptances and less fortunate writers to grind their teeth in despair.

Another point is also noteworthy. Keith never permits any woman, not even his wife, Sheila, whom he married after her repentant return from the arms of the elderly Lothario, to accompany him on those yearly outings. Sometimes Sheila complains, but all her arguments prove vain. Keith always finds excuses for leaving her at home.

He tells her, too, that they are only fishing trips. But he never brings back any fish.

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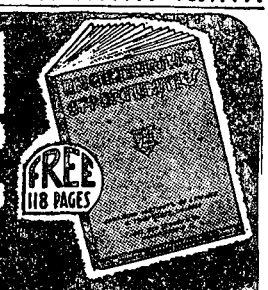

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READER'S PAGE

ATTENTION SHAVER FANS

Sirs:

This letter will serve two purposes. It is directed to those of you who have joined the Shaver Mystery Club, and also to those of you who have not as yet joined the club, but have shown your interest in the theories of Richard S. Shaver by contact with the country's greatest science-fiction magazine, AMAZING STORIES.

As you know, Richard Shaver has presented in fiction form his own amazing theories of the "cave worlds" and the "dero" who inhabit them. It certainly is for no layman to judge whether or not Shaver is right or wrong, unless he has the full facts and enough evidence to definitely determine for himself, afterwards, the answer.

Are there secret caves underground where "dero" control the ancient machines of the Titans? Are these "dero" responsible for the disappearance annually of tens of thousands of Americans alone? The Bureau of Missing Persons cannot explain this fact. Is Shaver right then that these people are being used for the sadistic pleasures of the "dero"? Are they slaves in the hidden caverns beneath the surface of the Earth?

And what of the so-called "flying saucers"? Are they indeed what Richard Shaver has said they are and *predicted* before the current national furore concerning them? Are they indeed craft capable of space flight? Are they here for the reasons Shaver says they are?

I am frank in saying that I don't really know —yet. And neither do most of you. But one thing I do know—and you do too—that too many things have happened that tie in with the now famous "Shaver Mystery" for it to be discarded with either a shrug or the commonly used term, coincidence. There *is* something behind all these phenomena. There *must* be some answer. Shaver maintains he has the answer. And that is why the Shaver Mystery Club was formed.

Already we have a great number of active members, contributing their own personal bits of information, information which when finally sifted down will be published in the coming issues of the club magazine. And we hope that eventually some definite answer will be reached, an answer that will be backed up by *proof*, one way or another. Also of great interest to any person who has read Shaver, is his huge 200,000 word novel, "Mandark," the story of the Life of Christ, which is being published in installments in the club magazine. A great deal of pertinent evidence for the entire Shaver Mystery is contained in this novel. It is a vast, thought-provoking account.

So if you haven't as yet joined the club, please do so. There are no dues. This is not a profit venture. The only cost is the subscription to the club magazine, which makes the club and our investigation possible. The subscriptions pay for the publication of the club magazine, a printed job, which in these price inflated days is no easy task. The subscription price is $1.00 for each two issues, but you can subscribe to as many as you want. Two have already been published. The third will be out by the time you read this letter. We are trying to get an even publication date for the club as a bi-monthly, so as Honorary President of the Club I am asking for your support—and any help you can give to further our investigation. Please let me hear from you.

Chester S. Geier,
The Shaver Mystery Club,
2414 Lawrence Ave.,
Chicago 25, Ill.

We would like to add our own voice to that of Chet Geier, in saying that we think the Shaver Mystery Club is a sincere effort, and that we have seen the club's publication and that all Shaver fans, and even those of you who are not, are missing something if you haven't read the first two parts of "Mandark" and the other articles and letters from people all over the country both pro and con on the Shaver Mystery, as published in the club magazine.....Ed.

THORNE SMITH'S SUCCESSOR

Sirs:

O.K. I give up. "Toffee Haunts A Ghost" broke down my resistance. I just had to write and tell you. When Thorne Smith died, I thought it was an irreparable loss, and now, lo and behold, his successor, Charles F. Myers, is just as funny as Thorne Smith, and just as clever and original. Please give us more of him. If he ever writes a book I'll be the first to buy it.

As long as I'm writing, I may as well get in some more licks. Your last few issues showed a marked improvement. Keep it up. Each one is a little better. I liked all the stories in the November issue. "Toffee Haunts A Ghost" was first, of course, but "Lamp Of Vengeance" was a very close second. And I don't like novels either. The shorts were all good, although none

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were very unusual in treatment or idea. Please give us more Myers, Livingston, and Jones, of "The Children's Room" fame. But please don't let Shaver back. If I read any more of him I'll send in my own version of the Shaver Mystery. I'm still holding a grudge against him for a story he wrote quite a while back that was full of mistakes that a few minutes in a library would have fixed.

By the way, your Reader's Page is getting to be one of the big attractions of FA.

Beth Trent,
91 West 39th St.,
Bayonne, N.J.

Well, Beth, now that Myers has broken down your resistance, why write us more often. And about this version of the Shaver Mystery, just what is it? We'd like to see it. And also, just what Shaver story are you referring to that you say had a lot of mistakes? And what were they?
.....*Ed.*

DOWN WITH LOVE!

Sirs:

Just finished the November issue of FA and here are my reactions:

"The Lamp Of Vengeance" started out nice but the later part didn't fulfill the promise of the beginning. By the way, why is it necessary to have love interest in your stories. Lotta hooey.

"Come Into My Garden"—a nice little fairy tale and that's all. More love hooey.

"Time Out Of Mind"—rather dull, but thank goodness, no women.

"Toffee Haunts A Ghost"—Breezy Tales does it better . . .

"The Miracle Of Herbert Plunk"—the author must know where the body is buried to get this one in the magazine.

"Hell Is A Circle"—SWELL!

This issue not up to standard but well worth the price.

Willard Shenkel,
Route No. 4,
Nampa, Idaho.

Come, come, Willard, haven't you heard? Love makes the world go round!.....*Ed.*

IMAGINATION IS A GREAT THING

Sirs:

I have often wished to write you but this is the first time I've gotten around to it. I spend most of my spare time reading. I like practically every type of story but my favorites are the "Fantastic Adventures" type. I've been reading them for years and can say I've enjoyed every issue. A few of my friends have asked me why I read that "silly" stuff, but I think if you have any imagination at all you can certainly enjoy the FA stories. At least I do.

I have just finished the November issue of FA and have given my copy to someone who appreciates the fantastic story.

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I think "The Lamp Of Vengeance" is one of your best stories up to now, but it is hard to tell as there are so many good ones. I'm sure glad that I'll be able to get FA more often now that it has gone monthly again.

By the way, Shaver is my favorite author. I have made a book of his stories. And along these lines, could you give me the name of the "Shaver Mystery Club"? I would like to join it. I did have the address, but lost it.

Thanks for a very interesting and a very entertaining magazine.

Carolyn R. Haska,
31-64 41st St.,
Long Island City 3, N.Y.

You'll find the address of the Shaver Mystery Club in the first letter of this issue's Reader's Page, Carolyn. And you tell all those skeptic friends of yours to read a few of our stories, then maybe they'll change their tune!.....Ed.

LET'S NOT BE SQUEAMISH

Sirs:

I just got the November issue of FA, and see where a number of readers objected to von Cosel's story, "The Secret Of Elena's Tomb." I feel that I must defend him, and also your editorial choice of his story. By all means do not let your readers' squeamishness stand in the way of a good story—and this was a good one—even though I I did have the staggers after I read it. As far as that's concerned, von Cosel needs no defense—his splendid love and faith were, and are, quite enough to uphold him.

The thing amounted to what we moderns call an "obsession," but all great ideas and discoveries are the results of obsessions of individuals. And I don't think it is so utterly impossible—his idea—as some of your readers think. The physical body is, after all, only a solidified belief. I'm one of those people who believe there was something to resurrection stories in the Bible. Of course, most people would say that the old boy just imagined it all, but I am of the opinion that *anything*—almost—*could be.*

I'm wide open to any new ideas. I'm sure I wouldn't have bothered with a corpse—I'd have thought that the place where her spirit was, was much better, and let it go at that—but individuals differ, and this old fellow was really unique. If the "dead" could be re-connected with their bodies in this way, why, it would probably make a lot of people happy. I personally prefer the quick and permanent way.

Anyway, this story was a welcome relief from so many end-of-the-world tales. I put a cover on it and sent it to several of my hardier friends who live some distance away.

In the new issue, "Come Into My Garden" was a peach of a little story, something of a poetic quality about it.

As far as I am concerned, "The Lamp of Vengeance" failed to click. No doubt other readers

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will like it, but not me.

"Time Out of Mind," by Geier, illustrates what I mean by a grain of plausibility. Such a thing as this *could* happen—and it was a well written tale to boot.

"The Miracle of Herbert Plunk" was another plausible tale. I've seen too much of the workings of the mind not to believe a set of circumstances such as this could not result in such feats. I like this Richard Casey.

"Hell Is A Circle" had a well thought-out plot and made a unique little story.

The "Toffee" escapades always amuse me.

"Son of the Sun," an article by Alexander Blade, I really liked. It had about the best explanation of the "disks" I've heard yet. In fact, in my own mind I was thinking something on the same order—only it sounded too fantastic to mention to anybody.

You've got a fine magazine—with good artists. If, once in a while, you give us a story like "The Lamp of Vengeance" I certainly won't kick. After all, I'm not your only reader, and there are probably plenty of readers who like that particular type of story.

Dwight Augustine,
P. O. Box 545,
Lima, Ohio.

We think you've hit on a good point, Dwight. We always try to give our readers a good story—regardless of its theme. And as you point out, it would get mighty dull if every issue was a prototype of the previous one. Everybody likes something new, and rest assured that in the pages of FA and also our big sister magazine AMAZING STORIES, you'll find the newest of the new. That's a Ziff-Davis policy—and a sound one as most of you readers have testified to in your letters.—Ed.

EVERYTHING GOOD BUT—

Sirs:

Despite the fact that FA usually has a good lead novel, "The Lamp of Vengeance" was a bad one. This is the worst novel I have ever read in FA. I think it belonged in a mystery magazine.

"Toffee Haunts A Ghost" was a very good novelette, and took first place in the issue.

"The Miracle of Herbert Plunk" took a close second. Casey did a fine job on this one.

"Time Out of Mind" took third.

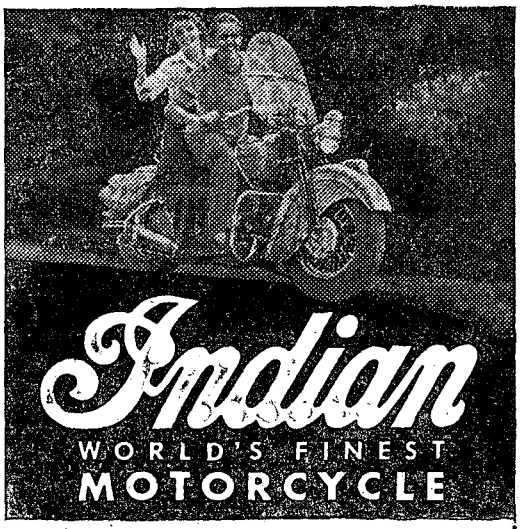
"Come Into My Garden" I put in fourth.

"Hell Is A Circle" took fifth place. But as for the lead story, I won't even rate it.

The art was o.k. but not as good as it usually is in FA.

Billy Shahan,
727 East Gentry,
Checotah, Okla.

Sorry you didn't like the Livingston story, Billy, but glad you liked the rest.....Ed.



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BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

Sirs:

I'm a little late with this letter of the October FA, but I want to tell you about it.

"Witch of the Andes" was superb! I've even joined Shaver's club. Let's see more of him!

. . . A Knotted String" was good!

"Mr. Beller and the Winged Horse," a fine story. Let's have a sequel.

"The Hesitant Angel"—fine!

"Photo Finish"—good! More like this.

"Whenever the Sun Shines"—fair.

"High Ears"—very good! More!

The art work, and the covers—fine!

Don (graveyard) Lindgren,
2238 3rd Ave.,
Anoka, Minn.

Fine — good — superb — more — you've got us swimming, Don, but we like it—the water's fine! ..... *Ed.*

ATTENTION COLLECTORS

Sirs:

Please publish this letter for the benefit of those readers who collect back issues of science-fiction magazines, of which I have the following for sale or trade:

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Philip N. Bridges,
2426 19th St. N.W.,
Washington 9, D. C.

There you are, Philip ..... *Ed.*

IS YOU IS OR IS YOU AIN'T?

Sirs:

"The Lamp of Vengeance," the lead novel in the November FA, is usual Livingston, good while you read it, bad taste afterwards.

"Come Into My Garden" is one of the best-worst fantasies I've read. It is mediocrity carried out to perfection.

"Time Out of Mind" is one of Geier's best silly-mysticisms.

"Toffee Haunts A Ghost" is better than Thorne Smith.

"The Miracle of Herbert Plunk" is a miracle of madness—the perfect wack-yarn.

"Hell Is A Circle" is so fiendish that it's hell to read it.

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Your articles, as usual, are unscientific amplifications of superstition.

Michael Wigodsky,
306 Evans Ave.
San Antonio, Texas.

Come now, Mike, is you fur us or agin us? ..... *Ed.*

GOOD READER'S PAGE

Sirs:

"The Lamp of Vengeance" was a good story, and much better than "Witch of the Andes" in the previous issue.

"Toffee Haunts A Ghost" and "Hell Is A Circle" tied for second place.

The rest of the stories were all right, but did not rate as high as the others.

I'm glad to see a much longer Reader's Page in this issue. You have one of the best in any stf magazine. Keep it that way.

James W. Ayers,
609 1st St.,
Attalla, Ala.

Don't worry, James, we intend to. You readers send in the letters, and we'll print them—as many as space will allow.....Ed.

CLASSIFYING THE AUTHORS

Sirs:

It's been some time since I've sat down and written in to the Reader's Page, so guess I better correct that right now.

I've just read the November issue of FA, and aside from being one swell issue, here's how the stories struck me. You'll note that I pay particular attention to the writers.

"The Lamp of Vengeance" was a good action-type story. I always put Berkeley Livingston in this class, and he never lets me down. When I want a good action fantasy, I've got Berk.

"Come Into My Garden" was a sort of off-trail yarn, I would say. And I would put the de-Courcys in this category, as off-trail writers. And I might add that good off-trail writers are hard to find these days!

"Time Out of Mind" by Geier was a craftsman-like job. I call Geier a craftsman. Will I ever forget his "Forever Is Too Long?"

"Toffee Haunts A Ghost" as good as Thorne Smith. Myers is another craftsman.

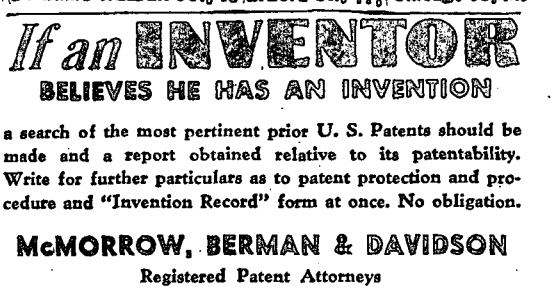
"The Miracle of Herbert Plunk" was an excellent idea yarn. I call Casey an idea writer, and as such he is one of the best.

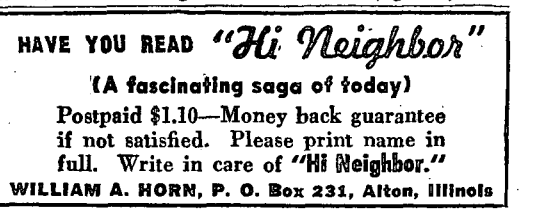
"Hell Is A Circle" is also a good idea story, also a little off-trail. Francis is both an idea writer and an off-trail writer.

Summing it up, in FA I get action stories, idea stories, off-trail stories, and what I call craftsman yarns. You can't beat a combination like that anywhere. With me, FA is tops.

John Sauer,
4809 N. Fairfield,
Chicago, Ill.

Glad to hear from you again, Johnny, and we like the way you classified the writers. How about the rest of you readers?.....Ed.





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★ By LESLIE PHELPS ★

TRAVELERS in various parts of the world have told us that most savages think that books speak to the readers. Some Eskimos, seeing a priest read from the Bible, thought that he heard the book and repeated the words to them. A Fuegian, after hearing a reader, took the book and put it to his ear to hear the strange voice and was surprised to hear nothing. The savages of West Australia used to be puzzled by the "speaking papers," as they called them. They couldn't understand how a person receiving a letter could detect how many sheep would arrive or how many were missing. A California Indian, having by a letter been caught in the theft of a number of loaves of bread which he was carrying to a missionary, hid the note under a stone while he ate the bread so that it could not see him and be able to tell of the theft.

GESUNDHEIT!

★ By JOHN LANE ★

THE ancients believed that souls left their bodies during their lifetime for little trips here and there, especially the souls of bridegrooms who were afraid to stay and face the dangers and responsibilities of marriage. Grain, especially rice, was used as a charm to keep the bridegroom's soul in his body. When people of early times saw their reflections in pools or glass, they thought that the images were spirits of the living. That is why we have the old superstition that breaking a mirror is bad luck. It might cripple a soul if it happened to be in the mirror at the time. Orthodox Jews used to cover all the mirrors in the house at the time of a death, so that the soul of the departed would go to heaven instead of into a mirror.

There is a theory that the animating principle is breath. Our word "spirit" is derived from the Latin "spiritus" which means "breath" or "breeze." This theory is at the bottom of our custom of saying a "Gesundheit (Good health)" when a person sneezes. A sneeze may be a good sign that a spirit is entering the body rather than leaving. In Africa, a person that sneezes is happy to know that one of his ancestors has possessed his body. As a rule a sneeze was considered an unfavorable sign, and to guard against the possibility that a soul may leave the body during the expense of air, people still repeat a magic charm such as "good health" or "God bless you."

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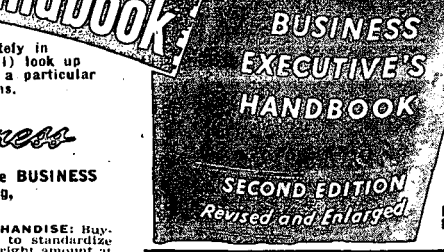

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